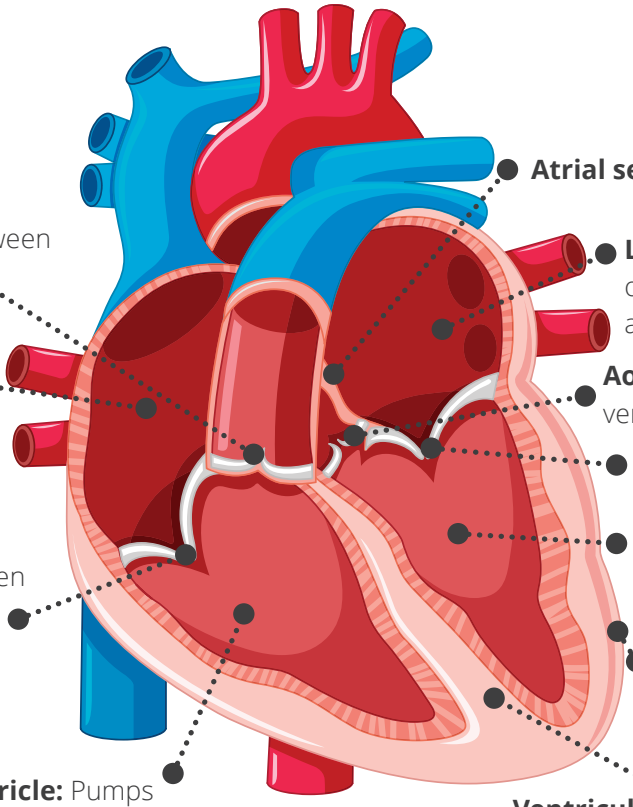
Heart health terms and tests

If you're experiencing heart problems or are at risk of developing cardiovascular disease, you should understand some key terminology. That makes it easier for you to communicate with your doctor and take the steps you need to become more heart-healthy.

Inside your heart[58,59]

The human heart is nothing like the images you see around Valentine's Day. This fist-sized organ in the middle of your chest has four separate chambers that pump blood throughout your circulatory system.



Atrial septum: Wall between atria

Pulmonary valve: Gateway between right ventricle and lungs

Left atrium: Receives oxygen-rich blood from lungs and pumps it to left ventricle

Right atrium: Receives oxygen-poor blood from body and pumps it to right ventricle

Aortic valve: Gateway between left ventricle and the rest of the body

Mitral valve: Gateway between lungs and left atrium

Tricuspid valve: Gateway between right atrium and right ventricle

Left ventricle: Pumps oxygen-rich blood out to body

Pericardium: Sac that encases the heart

Right ventricle: Pumps oxygen-poor blood to lungs, which enrich it with oxygen

Ventricular septum: Wall between ventricles

58 https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/tx4097abc#:~:text=The%20right%20side%20of%20your,the%20rest%20of%20your%20body.

59 https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/congenital-heart-defects/about-congenital-heart-defects/how-the-healthy-heart-works

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Looking inside the heart

The heart is an amazing organ. Each day, it circulates 2,000 gallons of blood through the lungs and more than 60,000 miles of blood vessels. It beats more than 100,000 times a day and more than three billion times over a lifetime.[60,61]

When the heart malfunctions, doctors can use a variety of tests to determine what the problem is.

Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)[62]

This test records the electrical signals in your heart. It helps doctors determine your heart rate and whether the rhythm is regular or irregular (arrhythmia). Depending on the situation, you might have an EKG test while you're lying down or while you're exercising (commonly called a stress test).

Holter and event monitors (ambulatory EKG)[63]

These portable monitors record EKG data over a continuous period of time, typically 24 to 72 hours. Ambulatory EKG can be used to identify heart rhythm problems that regular EKGs miss.

Echocardiogram[64]

This test uses sound waves to create moving images of the heart. The images show the shape and size of the heart and how well its components are working. The test can detect blood clots, problems with the aorta and fluid buildup around the heart (pericardial effusion).

Cardiac computerized tomography (cardiac CT)[65]

This test uses multiple x-rays to create a 3D model of the heart. With this model, doctors can evaluate problems with the coronary arteries, aorta and heart valves.

Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (cardiac MRI)[66]

This test uses radio waves and magnets to create detailed pictures of the heart. It provides more information than x-rays and CT scans and helps doctors determine how to treat problems like coronary artery disease and leaking heart valves.

Cardiac catherisation[67]

In this test, doctors thread a long, thin tube (catheter) from the neck, arm or groin through the heart's blood vessels. The test is used to find blocked blood vessels (angiogram), check the heart's pumping ability and measure pressure and oxygen levels. It is also used in procedures like angioplasty, where narrowed arteries are widened.

Gone are the days of exploratory heart surgery. Today doctors have a wide range of powerful, usually pain-free tools for diagnosing heart problems. Your doctor can tell you which tests might be right for you. At our Heart healthy resources hub, Aetna International members can find the information, tools and support needed to prevent and manage heart-related conditions. Aetna International members can also find help and resources in the Health Hub. For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

The beat goes on: Move more. Stress less. Live heart-healthy.

Heart-healthy resources hub: https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/heart-health-support-resource.html
Health Hub: https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do

60 https://www.livescience.com/34655-human-heart.html#:~:text=Facts%20about%20the%20human%20heart,billion%20beats%20in%20a%20lifetime).

61 https://www.healthline.com/health/fun-facts-about-the-heart#2

62 https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/electrocardiogram

63 https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/holter-and-event-monitors

64 https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/transesophageal-echocardiography

65 https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/cardiac-ct-scan#:~:text=A%20cardiac%20CT%20scan%20is,heart%20and%20its%20blood%20vessels.&text=Computers%20can%20combine%20these%20pictures,model%20of%20the%20whole%20heart.

66 https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/cardiac-mri

67 https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cardiac-catheterization/about/pac-20384695#:~:text=Cardiac%20catheterization%20(kath%2Duh%2D,blood%20vessels%20to%20your%20heart.

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