

A reminder to seek help from the NHS despite Covid-19

Health experts remind everyone that they should seek help from the NHS for heart conditions like heart valve disease which is a serious but treatable condition.

There are 1.5 million people over 65 living with the condition in the UK.

Heart disease has been found to be the most common pre-existing health condition in those who died with Covid-19 in March. Some patients have put off seeking help, fearing contracting the virus. But now patients are urged to put their treatment first.

Professor David Newby BHF Duke of Edinburgh Chair of Cardiology, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary said: "Timely treatment of symptomatic severe heart valve disease is critical for the life of the patient, particularly during a global pandemic where their existing condition can make them more vulnerable to contracting the virus. Our team did not hesitate to act. Assessing all our options and ruling out open heart surgery we proceeded with a treatment option that didn't involve a ventilator, reduced the need for an ICU bed and increased the possibility of the patient returning home within days."



Jessie

Jessie (83) from Edinburgh had treatment in hospital during the Covid-19 lockdown for heart valve disease – all thanks to her daughter-in-law.

She says that people should not be put off consulting the NHS about anything that they have wrong with them.

She explained: " At the start of the year I found out I had

heart valve disease. I was shocked to find out I had something that could kill me unless treated. I was put on the waiting list for surgery right away. It was coming more or less a week to the operation when the coronavirus outbreak started and all operations were suspended.

“I started to get really short of breath and didn’t really know what to do. My daughter in law is a surgeon and she was really worried, she knew I needed treatment urgently. As I was supposed to get open heart surgery there was growing fears about my hospital stay with the ongoing pandemic so we decided that TAVI was the best option.

“I eventually went in on 21st April . All the precautions were taken and I was tested twice for Covid-19. I felt perfectly safe the whole time. Immediately after the procedure I felt great as I could breath properly. It really made me realise how bad my breathing was before treatment. I was discharged 3 days later. The team were fantastic ... absolutely marvellous. I can not praise them enough.

“In a very short space of time I went from feeling terribly lousy to absolutely great – it’s as simple as that. Now I feel incredible, I’ve got no problems with my breathing and I have been going out to the garden and waking round.

“My first symptoms was a tightness in my chest last year. I first felt it while I was playing bowls. I then started to get short of breath and found myself having to sit and watch instead of play. At first I thought it was just my age, but then it was a case of if I walked a wee bit too quick I would feel like I would pass out. I made excuses for it. I was very fortunate, my daughter in law is a surgeon as she knew I couldn’t have waited any longer. I would still be waiting if it wasn’t for her

“My daughter in law really helped me understand the urgency of treatment particularly during the current coronavirus crisis.

I was in and out within 3 days and I felt incredible moments after the procedure, my breathing felt great. The team were fantastic, I can't praise them enough. I was tested twice for the virus and all precautions were taken. I've gone from feeling terribly lousy to absolutely great – it's as simple as that."



Jessie Moss

(Aged 83) from Edinburgh

Wil Woan, CEO of Heart Valve Voice said, "The trend of cardiovascular patients avoiding hospitals is alarming. By not receiving urgent treatment, the lives of heart valve disease patients are at great risk. We must stress, that all the necessary precautions are in place to ensure patients are treated safely. Cardiovascular disease is a key priority for the NHS Long Term Plan and we urge patients to monitor their symptoms closely and report any deteriorations immediately."

It is known that many people living with the condition do not experience severe or noticeable symptoms. As many existing patients shield or isolate noticing common symptoms such as breathlessness and reduced physical activity is even harder to spot. As more than half of symptomatic patients with severe aortic stenosis (the most common form of heart valve disease) die within two years of developing symptoms identifying symptoms is critical. Other symptoms include chest tightness and/or pain, palpitations, fatigue, dizziness and fainting.

The advice in place from leading heart valve disease charity and professional societies is for patients to [monitor their symptoms](#) closely and report any deteriorations immediately. Whilst there may be disruption and delays to appointments and treatments, urgent treatment for heart valve disease still needs to be undertaken and the right precautionary measures

are in place.

For further information and access to a Heart Valve Disease symptom tracker visit Heart Valve Voice website:

<https://heartvalvevoice.com/>