



Top 10 Things You Should Know About Heart Rhythm

If you or a loved one have been diagnosed with an abnormal heart rhythm, this guide will help you better understand arrhythmia, including what can be done to manage and even cure the condition.

What is a Normal Heart Rhythm?

Normally, the heart beats in a regular rhythm at a rate that is appropriate for the work the body is doing. Your heart's electrical system initiates each heartbeat and creates signals that trigger the heart to pump. These electrical signals control the heart rate and rhythm. A normal heartbeat has a specific pattern of electrical flow throughout the heart.

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When Your Heart Rhythm Isn't Normal

1. Heart rhythm problems are called arrhythmias and result from a problem in the electrical system of the heart. An arrhythmia refers to an abnormal heart rate, any change from your normal heart rate, or a change from your normal regular heartbeat pattern.
 - A fast heart rate (in adults, more than 100 beats per minute) is called tachycardia.
 - A slow heart rate (less than 60 beats per minute) is referred to as bradycardia.
2. Approximately one in 18 people, or 5 percent of the U.S. population, has an arrhythmia. A recent study has also suggested that one in four adult Americans over the age of 40 could develop an irregular heartbeat.
3. Arrhythmias can affect anyone—even people who are otherwise healthy and free of other forms of heart disease. Things that can cause the heart to beat abnormally include heavy smoking, alcohol use, excess caffeine or other stimulants, stress, thyroid disease, and fever. Expected changes in heart rate also occur during physical activity, stress or excitement, and sleep.
4. Arrhythmias can cause a few types of symptoms. These symptoms happen because the heart is not beating regularly, or may not be pumping blood as well as it normally would. Symptoms include:
 - A sensation of feeling one's own heartbeat (palpitations)
 - Light-headedness, dizziness
 - Shortness of breath
 - Temporarily inability to breathe
 - Fainting
 - Chest pain
 - Paleness
5. Arrhythmias may be completely harmless, or they can be life-threatening. Some arrhythmias are very brief and don't affect your overall heart rhythm. But if arrhythmias last longer, they may cause your heart rate to be too slow, too fast or erratic, causing the heart to pump less effectively.
6. Atrial fibrillation, or afib, is the most common type of abnormal heart rhythm, affecting 2 million Americans. If you have afib, the upper chambers of your heart beat in a rapid and disorganized way, called fibrillating. What is unique to afib is that symptoms can range from mild to severe, and treatment can range from minimal lifestyle changes to open heart surgery.
7. Age and gender come into play in developing afib. Men are slightly more likely than women to develop afib, but women diagnosed with it carry a longer-term risk of premature death. Older people are somewhat more likely to have afib than younger people. With the aging of the U.S. population, this number is expected to increase. Approximately 2 percent of people younger than age 65 have afib, while about 9 percent of people age 65 years or older have it.





8. Atrial fibrillation increases a person's risk for stroke by four to five times because blood flow in the upper chambers of the heart is sluggish and may allow a clot to form. These clots can potentially travel to the brain, causing a stroke.
9. There are a variety of treatments and therapies that will help you manage your abnormal heart rhythm. These can range from lifestyle changes and medications to procedures such as ablation, open heart surgery and pacemaker implantations. Scripps cardiac specialists will partner with you to decide on the best plan, taking into account your needs, symptoms, type of arrhythmia and the cause.
10. The key to reducing your risk for arrhythmias is to take the best possible care of your heart. You can do this by managing your existing health conditions, following a healthy lifestyle and avoiding substances that can trigger arrhythmias.

Risk Factors and Arrhythmia Triggers

Each of the following risk factors can increase your chance of developing a heart problem that can lead to an arrhythmia:

- Coronary artery disease
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Drug abuse
- Stress
- Smoking
- Advancing age
- Sleep apnea
- Excessive caffeine/alcohol
- Family history of heart disease
- Heart failure/congestive heart failure
- Certain medications, dietary supplements and herbal remedies

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