

Heart palpitations (Feeling your heart beat differently)

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Information for Patients

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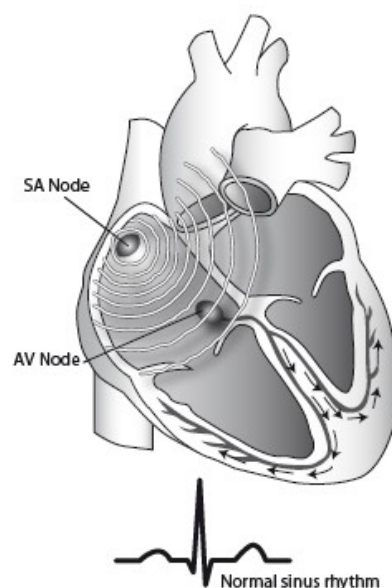
Introduction

Palpitations are common. They feel fluttery, like the heart is leaping out of your chest. They can also feel uneven or abnormal. Sometimes people feel a pounding in the neck or hear thumping in their ear. The feelings can be painful and worrying. But, they do not mean you have a serious heart problem, like a heart attack or a stroke. Lots of people have them at some point in their life. As they can be set off by many things. Caffeine in coffee can speed up your heart. Drinking less or cutting it out may help.

A normal working heart

The heart pumps the blood around your body and to your brain.

It pumps between 60 to 100 beats per minute (bpm). A regular beat is called sinus rhythm. The pump is driven by electrical signals. Your heart's natural pacemaker, called the 'sinus node', starts them. It sits in the top right section of the heart, called the right atrium. They spread through the top chambers of the heart. They cause the muscle to contract. This squeezes blood through the heart valves into the heart's bottom. The signals reach the atrioventricular (AV) node in the middle of the heart. It slows them as they continue into the bottom chambers of the heart (ventricles). This makes the ventricles contract and squeeze the blood out to go around the body and brain.



- A heart rate slower than 60 bpm is called sinus bradycardia.
- Sinus tachycardia is when the heart beats over 100bpm. Both are normal rhythms.

The heart rate changes all the time depending on what you are doing. An electrical recording of the heart (ECG) shows the rhythm of the heart. You may be referred for a heart

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monitor. This will record the electrical impulses of the heart. You must write down if you have palpitations during the recording. This will give us more information.

Causes of palpitations

Normal fast heart rate (sinus tachycardia)

When you are active, stressed, excited or in pain you may feel your heart beating faster. Sometimes, an illness or underlying condition may be the reason. They can cause your heart to beat fast. Examples are having an overactive thyroid gland, an infection or being anaemic. You may have taken an inhaler, drank alcohol, or had a cigarette or caffeine. These things can also cause your heart to go fast.

Missed or extra beats (ectopic beats)

You may feel either missed or extra beats. These are called ectopic beats and can be normal. The signal comes from another part of the heart. It fires a spark that causes the heart to contract early. There is a short pause after the extra beat. The gaps between the ectopic beats are not dangerous. You do not need to worry. They usually do not need treatment unless they happen a lot and cause you symptoms. If you have many symptoms and an ECG showed ectopics, a heart monitor may be arranged. It will count how many ectopics you are having. Other tests may also be arranged.

What can I do to stop palpitations and ectopics beats?

Lifestyle factors can cause ectopic beats and palpitations. These factors include drinking too much caffeine, alcohol, energy drinks, and smoking. Other causes can be some medicines. They include stress, lack of sleep, hormone changes, and some health conditions.

Treatment

The best way to treat the palpitations and ectopic beats is to spot and stop their triggers. More treatment is not needed often. Sometimes you may need a beta blocker. It stops the ectopics or fast heart rates and improves your symptoms.

More information is available at:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/heart-palpitations/

www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/conditions/palpitations

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Previous reference:

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