

Common Arrhythmias

What is arrhythmia?

Arrhythmias are a group of conditions in which the heart beat is irregular and beats too fast or too slow.

Common signs and symptoms

Arrhythmia symptoms include:

- Anxiety
- Chest pain
- Fainting (syncope)
- Fatigue
- Fluttering or pounding in your chest
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Racing heartbeat when feeling at the wrist (tachycardia)
- Slow heartbeat when feeling at the wrist (bradycardia)
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating

Some can be well managed by your doctor as a long-term condition, and others are life-threatening and require urgent treatment.

Atrial fibrillation

One of the most common arrhythmias, atrial fibrillation is when the heart's top chambers (atria) twitch rather than contract and beat rapidly, chaotically and out of rhythm with the heart's lower chambers (ventricles).

Atrial flutter

Atrial flutter is similar to atrial fibrillation but is more regular and less chaotic. However, it can develop into atrial fibrillation and vice versa.

Ectopic heartbeats

This condition refers to a missed or extra beat. Ectopic beats can occur in the top or bottom heart chambers and can occur in healthy individuals.

Paroxysmal arrhythmias

This is when the arrhythmia starts and stops suddenly, and the event can last for seconds, minutes, hours or up to a week.

Heart block

Heart block is a delay or a blockage of the heart's electrical messages, which may cause your heart to pump abnormally or your heart rate to slow to less than 60 beats per minute. It is also known as atrioventricular (AV) heart block and bundle branch.

Supraventricular tachycardia (SVT)

This is caused by abnormal electrical activity in the heart's atria, which cause the heart rate to increase very suddenly to over 100 beats per minute.

Ventricular tachycardia

Referring to abnormal electrical activity in the heart's ventricles, this causes a fast heartbeat that can start very quickly and last for seconds or go on for longer – and can cause cardiac arrest.

Ventricular fibrillation

This is a very fast, erratic and ineffective pumping rhythm in the hearts ventricles, and can also cause cardiac arrest.

Long QT syndrome, Brugada syndrome and Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome

Each of these can cause fast and irregular heartbeats. These conditions are related to a specific abnormality in the heart electrical system that can lead to fainting spells or even cardiac arrest.

Heart rhythm trace examples

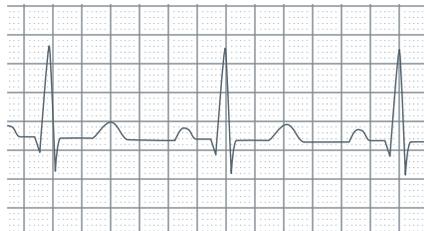
Bradycardia (slow)

Less than 60 beats per minute



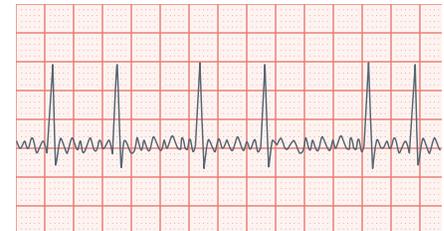
Healthy heart beat

Between 60-100 beats per minute



Atrial fibrillation / flutter

Top chambers of the heart (atria) twitch or flutter chaotically



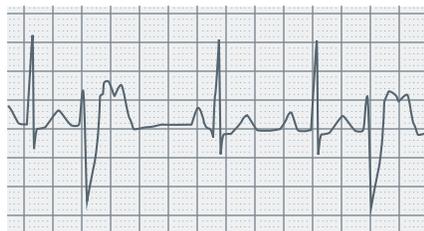
Tachycardia (fast)

More than 100 beats per minute



Ventricular ectopy

Extra or skipped heart beat



Ventricular fibrillation

Fast / erratic rhythm in the heart's lower chambers (ventricles)

