

ARRHYTHMIAS



WHAT ARE ARRHYTHMIAS?

Our hearts are controlled by electrical impulses that tell it when to beat. Arrhythmias, also known as heart rhythm disorders, occur when there is a problem with these impulses, causing the heart to beat too quickly, too slowly, or in an irregular way.

There are several different kinds of arrhythmias.

Among the most common are:

- Atrial fibrillation** – The most common type of arrhythmia, characterized by an irregular, and often fast, heart rhythm
- Supraventricular tachycardia** – Episodes of very fast heart rate when resting
- Bradycardia** – A slower heartbeat than normal
- Ventricular fibrillation** – A fast, life-threatening heart rhythm that can result in the heart stopping beating and requires immediate medical attention.

What are the symptoms and when should I see a medical professional?



There are a range of different arrhythmia symptoms, and some arrhythmias do not cause any symptoms.

Palpitations are heartbeats that become noticeable, for example, due to a fluttering, thumping, or racing sensation, and are a common symptom of arrhythmias. Having palpitations does not necessarily mean that you have a heart rhythm problem.

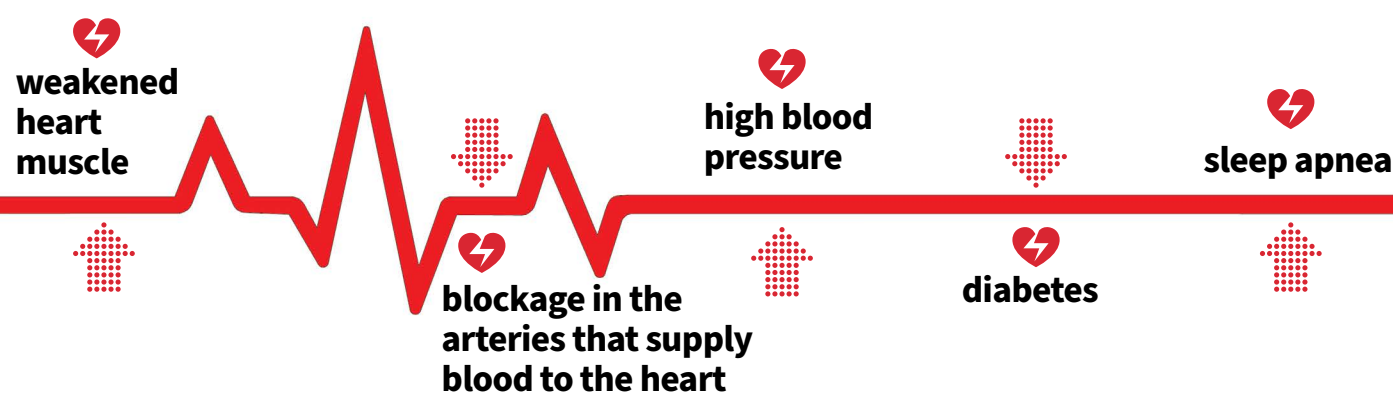
However, if you experience them regularly or for an extended period of time, you should see a medical professional.

Other symptoms of arrhythmia can include shortness of breath, feeling tired, and dizziness.



COMMON CAUSES OF ARRHYTHMIAS

Arrhythmias affect millions of people worldwide,¹ and are also becoming more common, as people live longer and risk factors increase.² Common causes and triggers of arrhythmias include underlying conditions such as:



Making some lifestyle changes, such as limiting caffeine and alcohol intake and refraining from smoking, can help reduce your chance of developing arrhythmia.



IMPACT OF ARRHYTHMIAS



Some arrhythmias do not carry the risk of severe consequences. Other arrhythmias can be dangerous and even life threatening. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment can help prevent severe impacts of arrhythmia.

HOW ARE ARRHYTHMIAS TREATED?

Most people with arrhythmias can live a normal life with appropriate treatment.

The treatment selected depends on the type of arrhythmia, and include:



- Lifestyle changes** – Such as limiting caffeine and alcohol intake
- Medication** – Medications may act on the heart's electrical impulses, change heart rate, or reduce blood clot risk. Different medication types are used depending on the type of arrhythmia.
- Electric cardioversion** – A treatment that uses a machine to deliver low-energy shocks to the chest to restore the heart's normal rhythm.
- Catheter ablation** – A minor procedure that destroys a small area of diseased tissue in the heart that is causing arrhythmia.
- Pacemaker** – A small device placed under the skin, near the collarbone that produces its own electrical signals which help your heart in keeping a normal rhythm.
- Implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)** – A small device placed under the skin, near the collarbone to monitor your heart's rhythm and shock it back into a normal rhythm when necessary.

¹World Heart Observatory. <https://world-heart-federation.org/world-heart-observatory/>

²Freedman B· Hindricks G· Banerjee A· Baranchuk A· Ching CK· Du X· Fitzsimons D· Healey JS· Ikeda T· Lobban TC· Mbakwem A· World Heart Federation roadmap on atrial fibrillation – a 2020 update. Global heart. 2021;16(1). doi: 10.5334/gh.1023.