

# HEARTBEAT, RAPID

(Tachycardia)

NOLENSVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE

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## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A heart rate (or heartbeat) that is faster than normal. In adults, the resting heart rate is normally between 60 and 100 beats per minute. Tachycardia is the medical term for rapid heart rate. Bradycardia is a slow heart rate.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Some people may have no symptoms.
- Heart pounding or palpitations. The pulse at the wrist or neck will be 100 to 180 beats per minute, which is much faster than normal.
- Faintness; a feeling of doom or anxiety.
- Chest pain.
- Cough.
- Being short of breath.
- Dizziness.
- Heavy sweating.

### CAUSES

An electrical system in the heart normally controls the heart rate so that it remains at 60 to 100 beats per minute. This allows the heart to provide the body with the blood and oxygen it needs to function. When something causes the heart to beat too fast, it may not be able to supply all the blood and oxygen needed by the body.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Heart attack, heart disease, or surgery.
- Thyroid disease.
- Fever.
- Anemia.
- Stress, anxiety, fear, anger, or being nervous.
- Smoking.
- Dehydration.
- Infections.
- Sleep deprivation (not getting enough sleep).
- Too much caffeine.
- Use of some drugs, such as albuterol, cocaine, ephedrine, or others, and some herbal remedies.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Often, the problem cannot be prevented.
- Avoid the risk factors where possible.
- Regular exercise.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most heartbeat problems are temporary and harmless. If the rapid heartbeat is ongoing, it can usually be controlled with treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

An ongoing rapid heartbeat can lead to life-threatening heart problems.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Tests may be done to measure the heart's electrical activity. Other tests may be done to check for medical problems that could cause rapid heart rate.
- A few patients may require immediate treatment, including electrical shock (cardioversion), to stop the rapid heart rate. In milder cases, no treatment may be required. Other treatment may depend on the cause.
- If the rapid heart rate occurs often, a small electrical device called implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) may be implanted under the skin. It can detect irregular heartbeats and shock the heart back into normal rhythm, when needed.
- Surgery may (rarely) be recommended.
- Ask your health care provider about ways to reduce stress in your life, and to stop smoking, if you smoke.
- The following steps sometimes slows the heartbeat:
  - Hold your breath briefly.
  - Pinch the skin on your arm enough to cause pain.
  - Bathe your face in cold water or put your head briefly in a sink of cool water.
  - Hold your nostrils closed and blow gently through the nose, making the eardrums pop.
- To learn more: American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Ave., Dallas, TX 75231; (800) 242-8721; website: [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org).

### MEDICATIONS

For repeated attacks, one or more drugs to control heart rhythm may be prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

Exercise regularly for 20 to 30 minutes a day (with medical approval). Being fit will improve heart health.

### DIET

Avoid caffeine and alcohol.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has an episode of rapid, irregular heartbeat that does not end in 4 or 5 minutes.
- Shortness of breath or chest pain develops.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page