

Arrhythmia

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An arrhythmia is an abnormal heart rhythm. There are many different irregular rhythms. Some arrhythmias are minor and some are life threatening. Many adults have irregular heartbeats once in a while that are not serious. You are more likely to have an arrhythmia if you are a smoker or are under stress, overworked, or fatigued; if you take certain illicit drugs, prescription or over-the-counter medications; or if you or a member of your family has a heart disease or disorder.

Symptoms may include:

- Change in heart rate, either fast or slow
- Dropped or missed beats
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Chest pain
- Change in level of alertness; faintness, or weakness

{mospagebreak title=What your doctor can do}

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose the condition using any or all of the following:
- Laboratory blood tests
- Holter monitor, ECG (electrocardiogram), and treadmill test, all designed to monitor your heart activity under different conditions. The holter monitor is worn at home; ECG and treadmill tests are often done in your doctor's office.
- Special X-rays and scans that let your doctor view your heart and blood vessels. Some special preparations may be needed for these tests.
- Once your doctor, through the exam and diagnostic tests, has determined the type of arrhythmia you have, your treatment choices can be discussed further. These may include:
- Order medicines to treat the arrhythmia - Anti-coagulants (to thin the

blood), diuretics (water pills), antiarrhythmics, and potassium supplements.

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Recommend surgery if needed such as inserting a pacemaker to help pace the beats of the heart; replacing heart valves; or bypassing blocked vessels.

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Recommend cardioversion (electrical impulses) to "jolt" the heart back to normal.

{mospagebreak title=What you can do}

What you can do:

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Familiarise yourself with your condition including your normal heart rate and rhythm.

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Eat a well balanced diet and try to limit salt, fats, and stimulants like caffeine (coffee, soft drinks, tea, chocolate).

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Stop smoking. This is the one most important thing you can do for your heart.

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Start an exercise program with your doctor's permission and advice.

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Reduce stress with relaxation, counseling, or lifestyle changes.

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Wear a medical alert pendant that gives the name of your condition. For more information on the Medic Alert products contact them at 1-800-825-3785.

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Learn and ask family members to learn CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

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Follow-up with your doctor regularly to monitor your condition with physical exams and routine blood tests.

Contact your doctor is you notice an irregular heart rhythm.

Seek immediate medical attention or call 911, if you suffer chest pain, shortness of breath or an unusually slow or fast heart rhythm!