

When your heart skips a beat for the wrong reason



We learn in primary school that most human hearts operate at around 72 beats per minute. It's a rhythm that we take for granted - until the heart suddenly stops running like clockwork.

What is a normal heart rhythm and why is it important?

Anything between 60 to 100 beats per minute is considered to be a normal heart rate, depending on your level of fitness. Factors such as age, gender and health may affect these numbers.

Your heartbeat pumps oxygen-rich blood through your arteries to all your cells. Oxygen is the driving force of cellular activity in your body and it keeps you alive.

Heart arrhythmia happens when the electrical impulses that control your heartbeat don't work properly. This causes the heart to beat irregularly, too slowly or too fast.

Symptoms of heart arrhythmia might include a racing heartbeat (tachycardia) slow heartbeat (bradycardia), chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness and light-headedness. Some patients report a fluttering in their chest. Many people don't experience any symptoms and only find out about their arrhythmia during a routine medical check-up.

When is it serious?

Arrhythmias may occur temporarily or as isolated incidents due to a temporary health issue or a traumatic event. Arrhythmia doesn't always cause lasting damage and usually disappears when the underlying health issue is addressed.

One type of arrhythmia that can be deadly is ventricular fibrillation. This happens when your heart beats too rapidly and the subsequent erratic electrical impulses cause the pumping chambers in your heart to stop pumping blood. Your blood pressure then plummets and it cuts off the blood supply to your vital organs. You will collapse, stop breathing and have no pulse and you will need resuscitation to recover.

Certain arrhythmias can also cause a stroke or heart failure if they go untreated.

Only a doctor can diagnose the various types of arrhythmia and prescribe suitable treatment and lifestyle changes to manage it. It is therefore crucial to consult your doctor if you frequently experience the symptoms.

What causes arrhythmia?

Many health factors can cause arrhythmia, including:

- High blood pressure
- An over- or underactive thyroid gland
- Smoking
- Alcohol abuse
- Too much caffeine
- Drug abuse
- Stress
- Scarred heart tissue from a previous heart attack
- Diabetes
- Sleep apnoea
- Certain medications such as cold and flu medicines and some nutritional supplements
- Blocked heart arteries (coronary heart disease)
- Changes to your heart's structure due to cardiovascular disease
- A heart attack

Heart disease and high blood pressure puts you at a higher risk of contracting arrhythmia, which in turn can cause greater damage to your heart and overall health, creating a vicious circle.

With the exception of genetic factors, most heart disease conditions are preventable with a healthy lifestyle.

Make healthy choices

With the exception of genetic factors, most heart disease conditions are preventable with a healthy lifestyle. Make consistent healthy choices such as:

- A heart healthy diet rich in nutrients from whole food such as fresh fruit and vegetables, grains and pulses and limited amounts of animal and unsaturated fat.
- Regular exercise
- Avoiding smoking
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Limiting alcohol and caffeine intake
- Finding healthy ways to deal with stress such as exercise and meditation
- Using over-the-counter medications wisely and always asking for your pharmacist's advice

Interesting facts

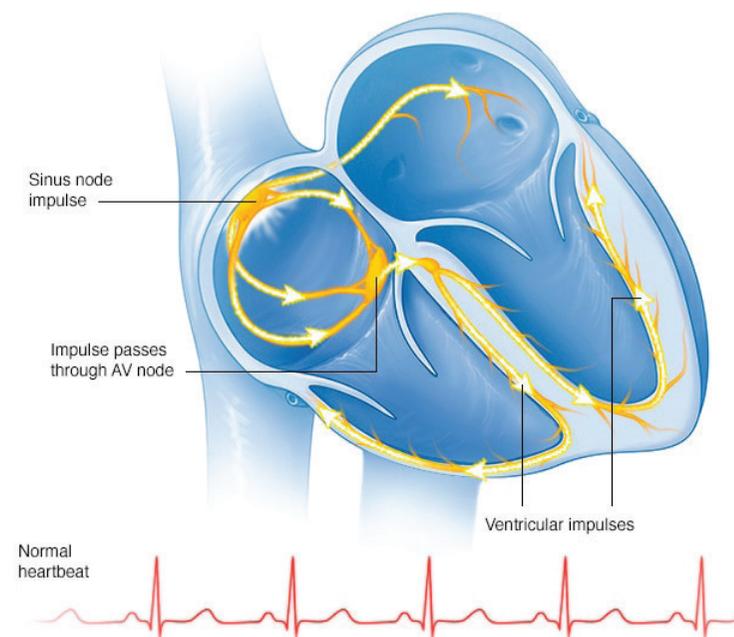
- Your heartbeat is determined by your sinus node and a normal heart rhythm is often referred to as a "sinus rhythm". The sinus node responds to your body's needs for oxygen-rich blood based on your level of activity and sends impulses to the heart accordingly.
- Your lifestyle is crucial. Research released by Unilever in 2011 shows that 82% of cardiovascular events such as heart attacks can be prevented if you maintain healthy blood pressure and cholesterol.

- The same research cites that blood pressure control can prevent heart disease and stroke in 37% of men and 56% of women.

Nobody can control their genetic heritage, but all of us have control over our lifestyle choices. Consistent healthy choices will help you limit your risk of suffering from preventable diseases. Your heartbeat is in your own hands. **é**

Sources:

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-arrhythmia/symptoms-causes/syc-20350668#targetText=Overview,heart%20and%20may%20be%20harmless;https://www.unileverhealth.co.za/files/uploads/Understanding_Cardiovascular_Disease;http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/8111/6264



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