

Abnormal Heart Rhythm Disease–Arrhythmia

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Arrhythmias occur when the electrical signals that coordinate heartbeats are not working correctly. An irregular heartbeat may feel like a racing heart or fluttering. Many heart arrhythmias are harmless. They are highly irregular or result from a weak or damaged heart, arrhythmias can cause severe and potentially fatal symptoms and complications.

Cardiac arrhythmia refers to a group of conditions that cause the heart to beat irregular, too slowly, or too quickly.

There are several categories of arrhythmia which includes bradycardia, or a slow heartbeat; tachycardia, or a fast heartbeat; irregular heartbeat, also known as a flutter or fibrillation; early heartbeat, or a premature contraction. Most arrhythmias are not severe and do not cause complications but can increase the risk of stroke or cardiac arrest.

Types

There are several types of arrhythmia, as described here:

1) **Atrial fibrillation:** This is the irregular beating of the atrial chambers, and nearly always involves tachycardia. Atrial fibrillation (A-fib) is common and mainly develops in adults over 65 years of age. Instead of producing a single, strong contraction, the chamber fibrillates, or quivers, often producing a rapid heartbeat.

2) **Atrial flutter:** While fibrillation causes many random and different quivers in the atrium, atrial flutter is usually from one area in the atrium that is not conducting properly. This produces a consistent pattern in the abnormal heart conduction. In some cases people may experience both flutter and fibrillation. Atrial flutter can be a serious condition and usually leads to fibrillation without treatment.

3) **Supraventricular tachycardia:** The condition known as supraventricular tachycardia (SVT) refers to a rapid but

rhythmically regular heartbeat. An individual can experience a burst of accelerated heartbeats that can last from a few seconds to a few hours.

4) **Ventricular tachycardia:** This condition refers to abnormal electrical impulses that start in the ventricles and cause an abnormal heartbeat. This often happens if the heart has a scar from a previous heart attack.

5) **Ventricular fibrillation:** This is an irregular heart rhythm consisting of rapid, uncoordinated, and fluttering contractions of the ventricles. The ventricles do not pump blood but quiver instead. Ventricular fibrillation can be life threatening and usually has links to heart disease. A heart attack often triggers it.

6) **Long QT syndrome:** This syndrome refers to a heart rhythm disorder that sometimes causes rapid, uncoordinated heartbeats. This can result in fainting, which may be life threatening. It can occur due to genetic susceptibility or taking certain medications.

PREVENTION

To prevent heart arrhythmia, it's important to live a heart-healthy lifestyle to reduce your risk of heart disease. A heart-healthy lifestyle may include eating a heart-healthy diet, staying physically active and keeping a healthy weight, avoiding smoking, limiting or avoiding caffeine and alcohol, reducing stress, as intense stress and anger can cause heart rhythm problems, usage of over-the-counter medications with caution, as cold and cough medications contain stimulants that trigger a rapid heartbeat.

COMPLICATIONS

Certain arrhythmias may increase your risk of developing conditions such as stroke, certain medication such as such as blood thinners, heart failure.

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