

Heart palpitations



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Palpitations are felt in your chest, throat, or neck that make you think your heart is beating too hard or too fast, skipping a beat, or fluttering.

TREATMENT

Treatment depends on the cause.



CAUSES

Most of the time, palpitations are not a serious problem. Common causes include:

- Anxiety. Fear. Stress. Hyperventilation.
- Caffeine. Diet pills. Nicotine. Drugs.
- Exercise.
- Medicines. Examples are beta-blockers, some asthma and cold medicines, and thyroid pills.

Other causes are:

- An arrhythmia (heart rate or rhythm disorder)
- Mitral valve prolapse (MVP). This is a heart valve problem. It may be treated with medicine. It is not usually a serious condition.
- Anemia
- Hyperthyroidism
- Low blood sugar

TRIAGE QUESTIONS

With palpitations, is any heart attack warning sign present?

NO

YES

► GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

Do any of these problems occur?

- Fainting. Feeling faint or dizzy. Cool, clammy skin.
- Pulse is over 100 beats per minute without exercise, anxiety, or fever
- New onset of a very irregular heartbeat and a history of a heart condition.
- Within 24 hours, palpitations occur 3 or more times. Each one lasts at least 10 minutes.

NO

YES

► GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

With palpitations, are any of these problems present?

- Signs of hyperthyroidism
- Symptoms persist for hours or days.
- Heart disease risk factors
- A person with an arrhythmia has new or worse symptoms.

NO

YES

► SEE DOCTOR

►

USE SELF-CARE

SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- If palpitations occur with exercise, stop the activity. Rest. When you exercise again, gradually increase how long and how intense you do the activity.
- To relieve stress and anxiety, do relaxation exercises.
- Limit or avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Don't take cold/allergy medicines. Don't take appetite suppressants.
- Call your doctor if rest doesn't help or if palpitations occur again and again.