

HEART PALPITATIONS



■ WHAT ARE PALPITATIONS?

Palpitations are a pounding, racing or fluttering feeling in the chest or neck caused by premature or irregular heartbeats. Palpitations are common, typically short-lived and usually harmless. Occasionally palpitations are a symptom of more significant cardiovascular issues so it is important to determine the cause of your palpitations.

■ SEE A DOCTOR IF:

- You have palpitations that last a few hours;
- Your palpitations occur frequently; or
- You have any symptoms associated with your palpitations such as sweating, shortness of breath, lightheadedness, nausea, vomiting, or discomfort in the chest, arm, back, or jaw

■ WHAT CAUSES PALPITATIONS TO OCCUR?

Palpitations may be brought on by:

- Dehydration from excessive sweating or physical activity
- Anxiety or stress
- Excessive tobacco, alcohol or caffeine use
- Anemia
- A thyroid problem or changes in your thyroid medication
- Medicines, such as diet pills, asthma inhalers or nebulizers, decongestants, or overdoses of medications like theophylline or antidepressants
- A lack of certain vitamins such as thiamine, or electrolytes like potassium or magnesium
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)

■ WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Pounding or racing feeling in your chest;
- A feeling of “missing or skipping” a heartbeat ;
- A fluttering sensation in your chest.

■ HOW ARE PALPITATIONS DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor will discuss your palpitations with you, including what symptoms you experience and what brings on the palpitations. You will probably have an EKG and might wear a Holter or Event recorder. These simple tests will help your doctor look at your heart rhythm and determine if your palpitations are harmless or a symptom of a more serious heart problem. Other tests that might be ordered by your doctor include an echocardiogram, a stress test or an electrophysiology study (EPS).

■ HOW ARE PALPITATIONS TREATED?

The treatment for your palpitations will depend on the cause. In most cases, no medical treatment is necessary. If your palpitations are the result of a heart problem, your doctor will need to treat that problem. In some situations, medications can be prescribed to help decrease or eliminate the palpitations. Alternatively, a procedure known as ablation may be appropriate.

To help your doctor identify the cause and treat your palpitations, it is helpful to keep a record of your palpitations. You should record:

- when the palpitations occur
- how frequently palpitations are occurring
- the duration of each episode
- what you were doing when the palpitations started
- what, if anything, made the palpitations go away
- any symptoms you experienced while you were having the palpitations