



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Cardiac Arrhythmias

A cardiac arrhythmia is a disturbance of the heart's electrical system that causes the heart to beat too fast, too slow, or irregularly. Asking the right questions during your conversation with a doctor will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate this condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Bradycardia	A slow heart rate. Bradycardia is not considered to be a problem unless it is slow enough to cause symptoms, or it is being caused by a serious problem with the heart's electrical system.
Tachycardia	A rapid heart rate. Tachycardia is normal when it occurs in response to stress or exertion. But when tachycardia occurs at rest, or when it is caused by a serious problem with the heart's electrical system, it often produces significant symptoms and may become very dangerous.
Premature ("Extra") Beats	A fairly common occurrence even in healthy people. They are usually considered benign, but can sometimes cause symptoms or lead to more serious arrhythmias.
Sinus Bradycardia	Sinus bradycardia, the most common cause of bradycardia, occurs when the sinus node—the cardiac structure that generates the heart's electrical signal—produces electrical signals at a slow rate. Sinus bradycardia is often normal in healthy people at rest. But if the sinus node becomes diseased, bradycardia becomes more severe, and may lead to symptoms or reduce a person's ability to exercise.
Heart block	A condition in which at least some of the electrical signals of the heart are blocked (or significantly slowed) from entering the cardiac ventricles.
Supraventricular Tachycardia	Refers to several types of rapid cardiac arrhythmias originating in the atria of the heart. They often produce significant symptoms, but are only rarely life-threatening.
Atrial Fibrillation	A rapid, highly irregular arrhythmia and the most common of the supraventricular tachycardias. Atrial fibrillation is notorious because it can cause blood clots to form in the heart, thus increasing a person's risk of stroke.
Ventricular Tachycardia	A rapid cardiac arrhythmia originating in the ventricles of the heart. It often causes severe lightheadedness and loss of consciousness, and may produce sudden death.
Ventricular Fibrillation	An arrhythmia of sudden onset that originates in the cardiac ventricles and consists of extremely rapid and chaotic electrical impulses. This arrhythmia causes the immediate cessation of effective cardiac pumping, and invariably produces sudden death unless the victim is successfully resuscitated.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage cardiac arrhythmias.

About Symptoms

- If I have palpitations, should I be concerned or just try to ignore them?
- What symptoms should I look for to know whether to alert you or call you for advice?
- What symptoms might I experience that should cause me to go to the emergency department or call 911?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- What is most likely to have caused my arrhythmia?
- Do I need to be on any particular diet?
- Do I need to restrict caffeine or alcohol?
- How much exercise should I be getting?
- Would losing weight be helpful in treating this arrhythmia?
- How much is smoking contributing to my arrhythmia?

About Diagnosis

- What specific heart arrhythmia do I have?
- What problems can this arrhythmia cause me? Could it lead to a stroke, or cause me to die?
- Are you considering additional testing that might help confirm the diagnosis, such as ambulatory monitoring or an electrophysiology study?
- Will you need to do periodic monitoring of my heart to check on my arrhythmia?
- Do I have any other medical conditions that might be making my arrhythmia worse?

About Treatment

- What is the specific goal of treatment? Is it to prevent death or a stroke, or is it simply to reduce my symptoms?
- Is this an arrhythmia that could be eliminated with ablation therapy?
