

Patient guide for arrhythmias

Fast, slow, or abnormal heartbeat

An arrhythmia is an **issue with your heartbeat**. It means that your heart is out of its normal rhythm – it may beat too fast or too slow.

Undiagnosed arrhythmias may lead to an emergency. If you have family history or other concerns with your heart, consult your physician right away.

Use this checklist to prepare for your next visit with your cardiologist.

Have you experienced any of these symptoms?

- Fast heartbeat
- Slow heartbeat
- Irregular pulse
- Rapid increases or decreases of the pulse (i.e., as seen on your Apple® watch)
- Fainting
- Dizziness

How long have you experienced these symptoms?

How frequent are the symptoms?

- Several times a month
- Several times a week
- Several times a day

How severe are the palpitations?

- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe
- Very severe

How often do the symptoms occur?

- They occur most of the time
- They occur sometimes
- They are occasional

Do any of these symptoms prevent you from doing your daily activities?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

Have you been diagnosed with any of the following?

- A heart defect from birth
- A heart attack
- A diseased valve
- A big or weak heart (heart failure)

Already diagnosed with an arrhythmia?

Here are some questions to consider asking your doctor at your next appointment:

- Can arrhythmias negatively impact my heart function?
- Am I at risk of sudden cardiac death?
- Do I need to take any medication to control my arrhythmias?
- Which medications should I take and for how long?
- What causes my arrhythmias?
- Can arrhythmias be cured?
- Do I need to see another type of heart specialist?
- Are there other tests I need to see if my arrhythmias are under control?

If you have **already been** diagnosed with some type of arrhythmia and are taking medications without good results, this guide can help you discuss other options with your doctor.

- **Are there other treatment options besides medication?**
- **My arrhythmias are very infrequent. Would an implantable loop recorder help identify them?**

- **Are there any heart devices (i.e., pacemaker) that can improve my heart function?**

- **Am I a good candidate for a heart device?**

If yes to the above question, then ask the following questions (if no, go to next section):

- How is a heart device implanted?
 - What are the risks of the implant procedure?
 - What are the benefits of a heart device?
 - What care is needed after the implant procedure?
 - Can I stop my medication after the implant?
- **What is an atrial fibrillation ablation procedure?**
To find out more about atrial fibrillation ablation, ask the following questions:
 - What are the benefits of an ablation?
 - Am I a candidate for ablation?
 - Will an ablation cure atrial fibrillation?
 - What are the risks of an ablation?
 - Are all ablations the same, or are there different types?
 - What is radiofrequency ablation?
How is radiofrequency ablation different from cryoablation?
 - Can I stop my antiarrhythmic and anticoagulant medication after an ablation procedure?

Heart failure

If you have **not been diagnosed** with heart failure, but you have symptoms or suspect you may have heart failure, talk with your doctor. During your visit, your doctor may ask you the following questions. Prepare your answers so that you can have more control over your appointment.

Have you experienced any of the following symptoms?

- Shortness of breath when making any effort
- Shortness of breath at night when lying in bed
- Shortness of breath when tying shoelaces
- Swelling of the legs and abdomen
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Hard time doing daily activities
- Dry cough
- Abdominal pain and quick fullness
- Fainting and loss of consciousness

How long have you suffered from these symptoms?

How frequent are the symptoms?

- Several times a month
- Several times a week
- Several times a day

How severe is your shortness of breath?

- It only happens when I climb stairs
- It happens when I walk **more than** two blocks on a flat surface
- It happens when I walk **less than** two blocks on a flat surface
- It happens when I walk inside the house
- It happens at rest, without making any effort

Do the symptoms affect your quality of life?

- Yes, they affect my quality of life
- They sometimes affect my quality of life
- They do not affect my quality of life

Do any of these symptoms prevent you from doing your daily activities?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

Have you ever been diagnosed with any of the following?

- A heart defect from birth
- A heart attack
- A diseased valve
- A big or weak heart (heart failure)

If you have **been diagnosed** with heart failure and you want to know the **next steps** in your treatment, ask the following questions to your doctor. Prepare your answers so you can have more control over your appointment.

- **What is the cause of my heart's weak or poor function?**
- **If the cause of heart failure is treated, is it possible to improve my heart function?**
- **Do I need to take medication to control my heart condition?**
- **What medication should I take and for how long?**
- **How long should I wait to find out if the medication works?**
- **If the symptoms continue despite the medication, what other options do I have?**
- **Am I at risk of sudden death?**
- **Are there other tests I need to see if my condition is under control?**
- **Do I need to see another type of heart specialist?**
- **Are there any specialists who treat patients with heart failure?**
- **What is a left bundle branch block? Does my electrocardiogram show this abnormality?**

If you've **already been diagnosed with heart failure and you take medication** but have not had good results, this guide may help you in discussing other treatment options with your doctor.

- **Are there other treatment options besides medication?**
- **Are there any heart devices (i.e., pacemakers) that can improve my heart function?**
- **What is cardiac resynchronization therapy?**
- **Am I a good candidate for cardiac resynchronization therapy?**
- **What are the risks of the procedure?**
- **What are its benefits on the symptoms of the disease and my heart function?**
- **How is a cardiac resynchronization therapy device implanted?**
- **What care is needed after the procedure?**
- **Can I stop the medication after the implant?**
- **Are medications effective in preventing my risk of sudden death?**
- **What is an implantable defibrillator?**
- **Am I a good candidate for an implantable defibrillator?**
- **Can I talk on my mobile phone and use electrical appliances after getting a heart device implanted?**

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