Emergency Services
Heart Palpitations

A heart palpitation (sounds like pal-pih-tay-shun) is when your heart feels like it is pounding, racing, or fluttering. You might feel like your heart has skipped a beat or added an extra beat. You might feel overly aware of your heartbeat. These feelings or sensation can sometimes be felt in your chest, neck, or throat. While you are having palpitations, your heart rhythm may or may not be abnormal.

Although they can be quite unsettling, most heart palpitations are harmless and go away on their own without treatment.

In rare cases, heart palpitations can be a sign of a more serious heart condition and does need to be treated.

Common causes of heart palpitations

- Stress, anxiety, fear, or panic
- Caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks)
- Nicotine from tobacco products
- Alcohol, energy drinks
- Illegal drugs such as amphetamines and cocaine
- Medicines such as decongestants, diet pills, or asthma medications
- Strenuous exercise
- Hormone changes related to menstruation, pregnancy, or menopause
- Medical conditions such as fever, anemia, thyroid problem, electrolyte imbalances

When to get help

Arrange to see your family doctor as soon as possible if:

- Your palpitations last more than 2 hours at a time.
- You notice the palpitations happening more often.
- The feelings during palpitation episodes get stronger and more uncomfortable.

Call 9-1-1 if you have any of the following with your heart palpitations:

- ☐ Chest pain, chest pressure, or a tight feeling in the chest
- ☐ Fainting
- ☐ Trouble breathing
- ☐ Extreme sweating
- ☐ Very confused
- ☐ Feeling very dizzy or lightheaded

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This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.

Treatment for heart palpitations

Treatment depends on what is causing the palpitations.

If your palpitations are related to activities in your daily life, your doctor will help you identify what is triggering the palpitations and work with you on a plan to avoid those triggers.

If your palpitations are the result of a medical condition, your doctor focuses on treating the medical condition.

If your palpitations are a side effect of a medication, your doctor will look at changing the amount or type of medication.

To learn more, it's good to ask

- Your family doctor

- Your pharmacist

- Fraser Health Virtual Care
  1-800-314-0999 or live chat online at
  fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare
  10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily

- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at
  HealthLinkBC.ca

What you can do to reduce or prevent heart palpitations

Each day, write down what you eat and drink, what activities you do, and when you get heart palpitations. Writing it down helps you to see what might be triggering the palpitations. Once you have an idea of what might be causing the palpitations, you can look at ways to avoid them.

General tips for reducing or preventing heart palpitations:

- If you are anxious or stressed, try relaxation exercises and deep breathing.

- Reduce or stop drinking beverages with caffeine.

- Reduce or stop drinking alcohol.

- Do not smoke or use tobacco products.

- Get regular exercise.

- Try to get 6 to 8 hours of sleep each night. Take time to rest.

- Do not take any medicines with pseudoephedrine, epinephrine, or ephedrine in them. Examples include cough and cold medicines, nose drops, or allergy relief medicines.

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