

# Arrhythmia

14

## WHAT IS ARRHYTHMIA?

**An arrhythmia is an abnormal heart rhythm, which means that your heart beats too slowly, too fast or irregularly. Your heart beats because of electrical messages that start in the top of your heart, and travel down to the bottom of your heart, using a pathway of special cells in your heart. This is a bit like electricity travelling through wires in a circuit. A slow heart rhythm is called a bradycardia. A fast heart rhythm is called a tachycardia.**

### Why does an arrhythmia happen?

- If there is a block in your electrical pathway.
- Electrical impulses go down an extra pathway in your heart.
- The rhythm starts in cells in other parts of your heart.

### Why do you get a bradycardia?

A congenital heart condition means that before you were born there was a problem with the development in

the structure of your heart. Congenital heart block can mean you are born with an abnormally slow heart rate.

## SURGERY & TREATMENT

### How do you treat a bradycardia?

A slow heart rate (bradycardia) normally happens because of a heart block. This is where the electrical message from the top to the bottom of your heart gets delayed or doesn't get through. This can be due to problems in the SA node and the AV node. They are the tissue areas between the atria and the ventricles of your heart.

Some heart blocks and slow heart rhythms need treatment and others don't. A pacemaker is sometimes put in, especially if you have collapsed or have other symptoms.

### Why do you get tachycardias?

- You were born with an extra electrical pathway, which can make your heart beat very quickly.

For over 50 years we've pioneered research that's transformed the lives of people living with heart and circulatory conditions. Our work has been central to the discoveries of vital treatments that are changing the fight against heart disease. But so many people still need our help.

From babies born with life-threatening heart problems to the many Mums, Dads and Grandparents who survive a heart attack and endure the daily battles of heart failure.

Join our fight for every heartbeat in the UK. Every pound raised, minute of your time and donation to our shops will help make a difference to people's lives.

- You inherited a faulty gene that can cause arrhythmias.
- You were born with a congenital heart condition needing surgical repair. This can leave scars, and damage to the electrical circuits of your heart.
- You can have an arrhythmia due to an infection in your heart.

### Treatments for tachycardias

- Lifestyle – sometimes avoiding caffeine and alcohol can help.
- Medicines including beta-blockers, calcium-channel blockers and other anti-arrhythmic drugs.
- Catheter ablation.

You may need an ICD if you have ever had a life threatening arrhythmia, such as ventricular fibrillation/ventricular tachycardia, or are at high risk of that ever happening.

### Types of tachycardias

arrhythmias that start in the top of the heart (above the ventricles) include:

- Supraventricular tachycardias (SVTs) – are usually due to an extra electrical pathway in your heart.
- Atrial flutter – this is usually a regular but often fast rhythm usually affecting people that have cardiomyopathy, valve disease, or had surgery for a congenital heart condition.
- Atrial fibrillation (AF) – an irregular rhythm – less common in young people, but can occur in people who have had surgery for congenital heart disease, valve disease or who have cardiomyopathy.

### Ventricular arrhythmias

Fast, life threatening arrhythmias that start in the bottom of your heart (ventricles) are called ventricular tachycardia (VT) and ventricular fibrillation (VF).

### THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

- Physical activity
- Healthy lifestyle
- Pregnancy
- Contraception
- Medicines (including warfarin)

### Find out more about your heart and visit:

- [yheart.net](http://yheart.net)
- [heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](http://heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)
- [c-r-y.org.uk](http://c-r-y.org.uk)

Revealing the facts  
about your condition

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[bhf.org.uk](http://bhf.org.uk)

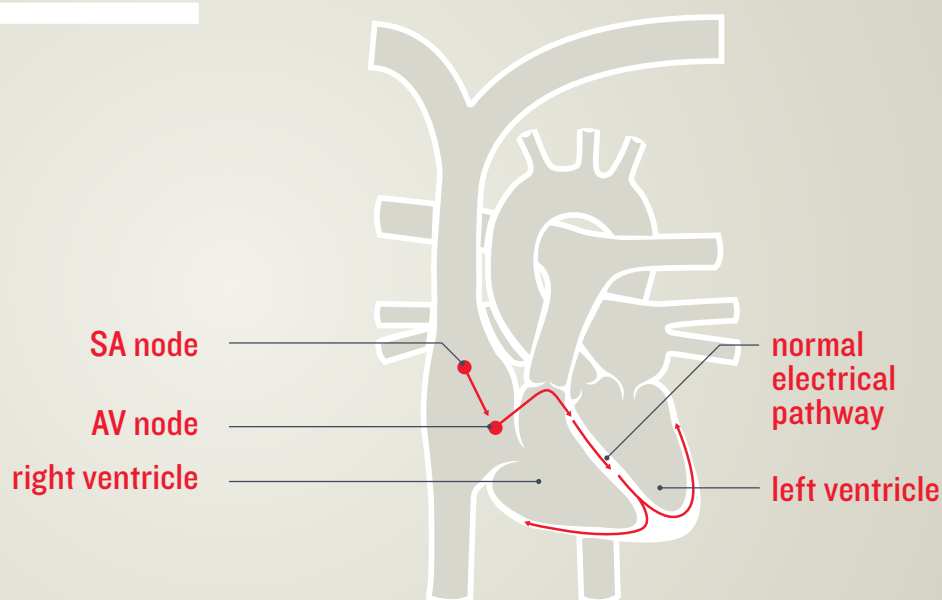
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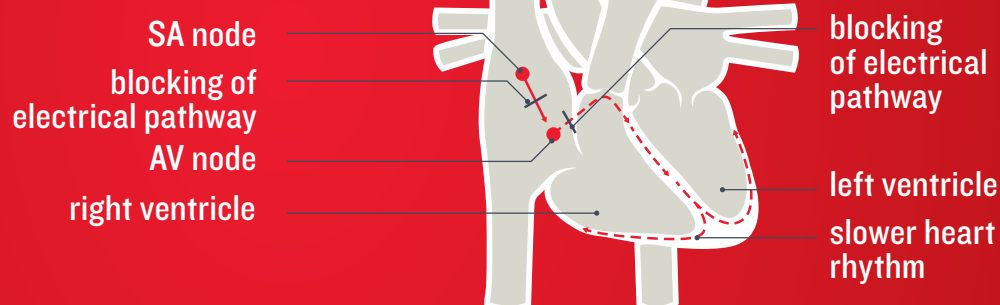
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# A REGULAR HEART RHYTHM

Each regular heartbeat begins in the natural pacemaker of the heart (the sino-atrial or SA node).



## BRADYCARDIAS AND BLOCKS



## TACHYCARDIAS

