

Palpitations

Heart palpitations are heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable and may feel like pounding, fluttering or an irregular beating. You may also feel these sensations in your throat or neck. Palpitations may seem alarming and be uncomfortable, but in most cases they're harmless and are not a sign of a serious problem. Sometimes you may feel an extra or missed beat. These are known as ectopic beats and are also usually nothing to worry about.

Causes of heart palpitations

Lifestyle triggers, which include strenuous exercise; not getting enough sleep; drinks containing caffeine; alcohol; smoking; recreational drugs or rich or spicy foods. In these cases, the palpitations should go away on their own. Avoiding these triggers may help stop them from coming back.

Excitement, anxiety, stress and panic attacks are also causes. Doing breathing exercises and learning how to deal with a panic attack may help if you're feeling stressed, anxious or panicked.

Medicines can occasionally trigger palpitations, including medicines to treat the following conditions: asthma, high blood pressure, allergies, antibiotics and anti-depressants. Speak to a GP if you think a medicine may be causing your heart palpitations. But do not stop taking a prescribed treatment without first getting medical advice.

Hormonal changes during a woman's period, pregnancy or the menopause may cause palpitations – these are usually temporary and not a cause for concern.

Although palpitations can be caused by abnormal rhythms (arrhythmias) such as supraventricular tachycardias (SVTs) and atrial fibrillation (AF) which may require treatment, this is unusual and the vast majority do not need any treatment. During your visit, we may have carried out a trace of your heart (an ECG, electrocardiogram) and taken some observations of your heart rate, blood pressure and temperature to specifically look for these arrhythmias

Certain heart conditions affecting the heart muscles, valves or pumping strength may also cause palpitations and during your visit we will have listened to your heart and lungs to ensure everything is working correctly.

Palpitations may also be caused by other medical conditions such as high temperature, anaemia, low blood sugar, overactive thyroid and when standing up from sitting or lying down.

When to see a GP

You do not usually need to see a GP if the palpitations pass quickly and only happen occasionally. They're unlikely to be caused by a serious problem and probably will not need treatment.

But it's a good idea to see a GP if:

- the palpitations last a long time, do not improve or get worse
- you have a history of heart problems
- you're concerned about the palpitations

If you cannot have an ECG at the GP surgery or the GP wants to arrange heart monitoring over a longer time period, you may be referred for tests at a local hospital.

When to get emergency help

Call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest Emergency Department if you have heart palpitations and any of the following symptoms:

- severe shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- dizziness or light-headedness
- fainting or blackouts

These symptoms could indicate a serious or potentially life-threatening heart problem that should be checked by a doctor straight away.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.

For additional medical advice, if your symptoms or condition worsens:

Contact your GP

NHS 111:

Get help with your symptoms, NHS111:
Information to help you manage your health:

Telephone 111

<https://111.nhs.uk/>
www.nhs.uk

In an emergency telephone 999

Emergency Department
(A&E)
Alexandra Hospital
Woodrow Drive
Redditch B98 7UB
Tel: 01527 512030

Minor Injury Unit
Kidderminster Hospital
Bewdley Road
Kidderminster DY11
6RJ
Tel: 01562 513039

Emergency Department (A&E)
Worcestershire Royal Hospital
Charles Hastings Way
Worcester WR5 1DD
Tel: 01905 760743