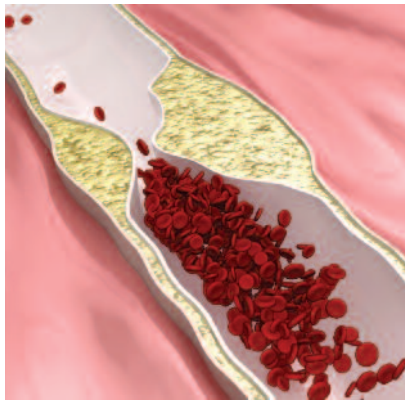


# Risk Factors and Prevention

Even people who look healthy and free of heart disease can have arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms).



But, those with heart disease are at the highest risk. So, reducing heart disease is important to lowering the risk of arrhythmias. Since the cause of an arrhythmia isn't always clear, the best course of action is to prevent and treat heart problems, such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and atherosclerosis ("clogged" arteries).

## **Preventing Arrhythmias and Heart Disorders**

Prevent heart disease by lowering risk factors that can lead to heart disease or heart rhythm problems, and monitor and treat any existing heart problems.

### **Make healthy lifestyle choices.**

Living a "heart healthy" life is the best way to reduce the chances of developing heart disorders. Exercising regularly; maintaining a healthy weight; and eating a healthy, low-fat diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and other vitamin-rich foods are the cornerstones of "heart healthy" living.

**Stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke** (smoke from other people). Tobacco causes as much as one-third of all heart disease.

**Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine, alcohol and other substances** that may contribute to abnormal heart rhythms or heart disease.

**Avoid unnecessary stress** and find ways to manage or control stressful situations that cannot be avoided.

**Have regular physical exams** and tell your doctor right away about any unusual symptoms you have.

**Talk to a doctor about treating health problems that may contribute to abnormal heart rhythms and heart disease,** including atherosclerosis ("clogged" arteries), heart valve damage, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and thyroid disease.

DID YOU  
**know**

In 1929, German surgeon Werner Forssmann (1904-1979) examined the inside of his own heart by threading a catheter into his arm vein and pushing it 20 inches into his heart, inventing cardiac catheterization, a now common procedure.

A healthy heart pumps approximately  
**2,000** gallons of blood a day.

The following conditions can increase the chance of developing arrhythmias:

*Coronary artery disease (blockage in the arteries/pipes of the heart)*

*High blood pressure*

*Diabetes*

*Smoking*

*High cholesterol*

*Obesity/overweight*

*A high-fat diet*

*Excessive use of alcohol (more than 2 drinks per day)*

*Drug abuse*

*Stress*

*Family history of heart disease*

*Advancing age (getting older)*

*Certain over-the-counter and prescription medications, dietary supplements, and herbal remedies.*

### **Monitoring and Treating Existing Heart Disorders**

- Effectively treating any existing heart disorder is the best way to prevent it from becoming worse.
- Have regular checkups.
- Understand how some health conditions may increase the risk of abnormal heart rhythms.
- Learn about heart disorders, tests, and treatment options, and talk to your doctor or other health care provider.
- Find out if your heart's electrical system and its ability to pump blood have been affected by heart muscle damage from a heart attack or another cause.
- Learn the importance of an ejection fraction (EF), which measures the pumping function of the heart. EF is a measure of the

percentage or fraction of blood the heart pumps out with each beat.

An abnormally low EF is the single most important factor in predicting the risk of sudden cardiac death (dying from an abnormal heart rhythm).

- Follow treatment plans, and take all medications as prescribed.
- Report any new symptoms or changes in existing symptoms to your doctor/healthcare provider as soon as possible.