

WHAT IS A HEART ARRHYTHMIA?

A heart arrhythmia is an irregular heartbeat or abnormal heart rhythm.

There are many types of arrhythmias. They can occur in the heart's upper chambers (atria) or lower chambers (ventricles). Arrhythmias may occur at any age. Some arrhythmias are so brief (a temporary pause or premature beat) that the overall heart rhythm is not significantly affected. But if arrhythmias last longer, they may cause the heart rate to be too slow, too fast, or the heart rhythm can be erratic — so the heart pumps less effectively and can lead to stroke, sudden cardiac arrest, and death.

Common types of arrhythmias:

- ♥ **ATRIAL FIBRILLATION:** upper heart chambers contract irregularly
- ♥ **BRADYCARDIA:** slow heart rate
- ♥ **CONDUCTION DISORDERS:** electrical impulses slow down or block the heart beat
- ♥ **PREMATURE CONTRACTION:** early heart beat
- ♥ **TACHYCARDIA:** very fast heart rate
- ♥ **VENTRICULAR FIBRILLATION:** disorganized contraction of the lower chambers of the heart

Common arrhythmia signs & symptoms include:

- ♥ Premature beats, palpitations or skipped beats
- ♥ Light-headedness
- ♥ Dizziness
- ♥ Fainting
- ♥ Fatigue

WHAT IS A PULSE?

The number of times your heart beats per minute



WOMENHEART: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's first and still only patient centered organization serving the 43 million American women living with or at risk for heart disease — the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy and community education. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To receive a free online heart health action kit or to donate visit www.womenheart.org.



1100 17th Street NW • Suite 500 • Washington, DC 20036
P 202.728.7199 • F 202.728.7238

www.womenheart.org



Bristol-Myers Squibb



CHECK
YOUR
PULSE.



BEAT HEART
ARRHYTHMIAS

WHY MONITOR MY PULSE?

Being aware of your pulse can help you detect arrhythmias.

WHEN SHOULD I CHECK MY PULSE?

To get your baseline pulse and normal rhythm, take your resting pulse when you wake in the morning and before going to bed. Since your pulse rate changes depending on what activity you are doing, it also can be good to take your pulse at various points throughout the day.

Keep a record of your pulse, along with the day and time taken and notes about how you felt at the time (see chart on far right panel for an example).

WHAT IS A NORMAL PULSE RATE?

A normal pulse rate is different for everyone. However, a normal pulse rate is typically between 60 and 100 beats per minute.

There are normal reasons why your pulse may be slower or faster. This may be due to your level of physical activity, age, medications, caffeine, level of fitness, or illnesses including heart conditions, stress, and anxiety.



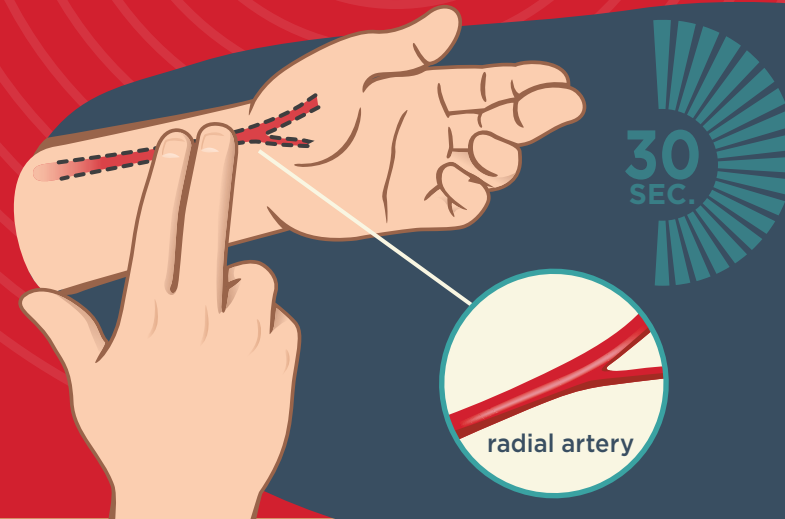
KNOW YOUR PULSE IN 4 STEPS

1 To assess your resting pulse rate in your wrist, sit down for 5 minutes beforehand. Remember that any stimulants (such as caffeine or nicotine) taken before the reading will affect the rate. You will need a watch or clock with a second hand.

2 Hold your left or right hand out with your palm facing up and your elbow slightly bent.

3 With your other hand, place your index and middle fingers on your wrist, at the base of your thumb. Your fingers should sit between the bone on the edge of your wrist and the stringy tendon attached to your thumb (as shown in the image). You may need to move your fingers around a little to find the pulse. Keep firm pressure on your wrist with your fingers in order to feel your pulse.

4 Count the number of pulses you feel for 30 seconds, and multiply by 2 to get your pulse in beats per minute. If your pulse rhythm is irregular, you should count for 1 minute and do not multiply.



SHOULD I SEEK FURTHER ADVICE?

See your doctor for further advice if ...

- You have a persistent pulse rate above 120 or below 40 beats per minute
- Your heart seems to be racing some or most of the time and you are feeling unwell
- Your heart seems to be slow some or most of the time and you are feeling unwell
- Your heart feels irregular ("jumping around," racing, or slow), even if you feel normal



RECORD YOUR PULSE HERE

DAY	PULSE RATE	NOTES
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		