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Bradycardia (slow heart rhythm)

This information sheet has been designed for patients that have been diagnosed with bradycardia and their carers. It provides information on symptoms and treatment options.

A healthy heart will normally beat in a steady and coordinated way. It will slow down or speed up depending on the body's needs. The rate at which your heart beats is important because it influences how much blood and oxygen circulates around the body.

When the heart rhythm is under normal control, it is referred to as sinus rhythm. When in sinus rhythm the heart's natural pacemaker controls the rhythm. The hormones and nervous system of the body affect this pacemaker and help in determining the heart rate.

A heartbeat that is too slow is called bradycardia.

Sinus bradycardia is an unusually slow heartbeat where the natural pacemaker is still in control. This commonly occurs in athletes or during a state of deep relaxation. However, the slowing of the heart rate can also be abnormal. If the rate is too slow for a given person, then symptoms such as lightheadedness or blacking out (syncope) may occur.

Slow heart rates can be as a result of medications that have affected the natural pacemaker causing it to drop its rate too low for a particular individual. It can also be caused by problems elsewhere in the body that may affect the nerves or hormones.

Symptoms of bradycardia

A heartbeat that is too slow will not pump blood through the body efficiently. Common symptoms of bradycardia are:

- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Fainting (syncope)

An ine fficientslow'pump'cancauselowblood pressure and sufferersoflowbloodpressurewill often complain of feeling faint although not actually blacking out (pre-syncope).

Treatment options for bradycardia

Commonly, bradycardia is treated by stopping any medication that may be affectingtheheart rate, and treating problems elsewhere in the body which may be the cause.

If the bradycardia is persistent and symptoms are present, then the condition can be easily corrected by implanting a permanent pacemaker under the skin to speed up the heart rhythm (see STARS pacemaker Information sheet)

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Please remember that this publication provides general guidelines only. Individuals should always discuss their condition with a healthcare professional.
If you would like further information or would like to provide feedback please contact STARS.