



# Arrhythmia Checklist

Could your heart rhythm problem be dangerous?



Working together to improve the diagnosis, treatment and quality of life for all those affected by arrhythmias

[www.hearhythmalliance.org](http://www.hearhythmalliance.org)

Registered Charity No. 1107496



# BLACKOUTS    Dizziness palpitations, or short of breath?

*Do you or a member of your family experience any of the above symptoms?*

## Introduction

This checklist is designed to help you and your doctor determine whether or not you suffer from a heart rhythm disorder. Also, called arrhythmias, heart rhythm problems are a leading cause of symptoms and the most common cause of sudden death in the UK today.

It was prepared with the guidance of the Medical Advisory Committee of Arrhythmia Alliance. None of these on their own makes it certain that you have an arrhythmia, but if you or your family have experienced any of the above, you should read this checklist to help you decide what to do next.

## What is an arrhythmia?

- A cardiac arrhythmia is when the heart beats too fast, too slowly or irregularly.
- These beating problems arise because of faults with the heart's electrical system.
- Arrhythmias are caused by, or arise from, a range of conditions including heart failure, blackouts, syncope, electrolyte disturbances, thyroid disorders, infection, sudden cardiac arrest, heart attack, stroke, cardiomyopathy high blood pressure, sleep apnoea and obesity.

## Why are arrhythmias a problem in the UK?

- There are over 100,000 deaths from arrhythmias in the UK every year.

## Which doctor should I see about my arrhythmia?

- There are many heart rhythm specialists in the UK. It is important when being referred to ensure you are seen by one of these specialists because not all cardiologists are trained in this speciality.

## What is wrong with your heart, the plumbing or the electrics?

- A 'plumbing problem' occurs when part of the heart's blood supply is reduced or blocked, causing the heart muscle to become injured or die. This can then result in a heart attack.
- An 'electrical problem' can prevent the heart from functioning effectively. There are many causes such as inherited disorders such as Long QT Syndrome (LQTS) or Supraventricular Tachycardia (SVT), congenital abnormalities, severe heart failure, electrocution, or drug overdose. This can then lead to sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). When electrical faults cause arrhythmias, AND there is heart disease such as a previous heart attack, or heart failure, then the risks of death may be high, and a cardiologist should be involved in managing all such cases.

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## Treating arrhythmias

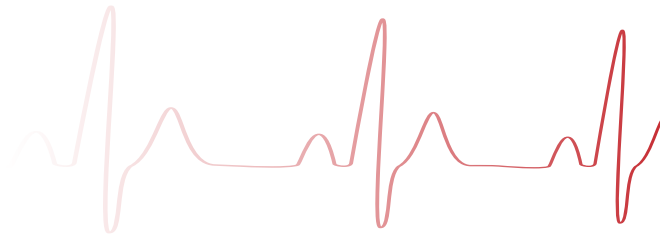
- There are several treatment options, and many arrhythmias can be treated without drugs or side effects.
- For many arrhythmias, a pacemaker-like device, or implanted cardiac device, such as an ICD CS-ICD or CRT can completely resolve the problem almost instantly.

## The importance of a heart rhythm tracing, electrocardiogram, or ECG

- The information that is of most use to your Cardiologist or heart rhythm specialist is an ECG (electrical recording of the heart beat), recorded during your symptoms and therefore during your arrhythmia. This will make the diagnosis and treatment much easier and quicker. It is your RIGHT to ask doctors or nurses who record an ECG on you in the ambulance, surgery, or hospital, for a copy for yourself, according to Government guidelines (the National Service Framework for Arrhythmias). Retain this copy, and do not give it away or lose it. Take it with you to a consultation with a Cardiologist or heart rhythm specialist, but always keep a copy yourself for future use if needed.

## Checklist

- Do you experience palpitations/shortness of breath?
- Have you fainted or passed out DURING exercise, whilst emotional or when startled?
- Have you ever fainted or passed out AFTER exercise?
- Do you feel your heart beating rapidly or more rapidly than it should?
- Do you feel your heart beating irregularly?
- If you have had an ECG, did you keep a copy?
- Have you ever had discomfort, pain, or pressure in your chest during exercise?
- Have you ever been diagnosed with an unexplained seizure or fit?
- Have you been diagnosed with epilepsy which fails to respond to medication?
- Have you ever had exercise-induced asthma not well controlled with medication?
- Are there any family members who had a sudden, unexpected, unexplained death before age 40 (including cot death, car accident or drowning)?
- Are there any family members who died suddenly of heart problems before age 40?
- Are there any family members who have had unexplained fainting or seizures?
- Are there any relatives with certain conditions, such as:
  - Enlarged heart: hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy (HOCM)
  - Heart rhythm problems: Long QT syndrome (LQTS)
  - Short QT syndrome
  - Brugada syndrome
  - Marfan's syndrome (aortic rupture)
  - Heart attack at age 40 or younger
  - Pacemaker or implanted cardiac device (ICD)



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Please remember that this publication provides general information. You should always discuss and seek advice from your healthcare professional what is most appropriate for you.

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If you would like further information or would like to provide feedback please contact Arrhythmia Alliance.