

PREMATURE VENTRICULAR CONTRACTIONS (PVCs)

Premature Ventricular Contractions (PVCs) are abnormal contractions that begin in the ventricles or lower chambers of your heart. These contractions usually occur sooner than the expected regular heartbeat. These extra heartbeats disrupt your regular heart rhythm and may cause you to feel either a fluttering or a feeling of a skipped beat in your chest.

Symptoms:

- Fluttering or palpitations
- Pounding or jumping feeling in chest
- Feeling of Skipped or missed beats
- Increased awareness of your heartbeat
- If the PVCs are frequent, you may experience weakness, dizziness or shortness of breath
- Causes— PVCs are very common, and many healthy individuals experience them. Often the underlying cause cannot be identified.
- PVCs can also be associated with: Alcohol or illegal drugs, caffeine, tobacco, exercise or anxiety
- PVCs that occur more frequently or for longer periods are more likely the result of injury to the heart muscle from coronary artery disease, congenital heart disease, high blood pressure or heart failure

Diagnosis:

- Your doctor will diagnose your PVCs by evaluating your heart rhythm. This can be done by an ECG or a heart monitor. An ECG is only a brief snapshot of your heart rhythm and may not capture when you are experiencing PVCs, so your doctor will more likely have you wear a heart monitor to evaluate your PVCs

Treatment

- If you only have PVCs occasionally, and you are otherwise healthy there is likely no reason for concern and no need for treatment.
- If your PVCs are more frequent or you are experiencing symptoms from your PVCs, your doctor may prescribe a medication to prevent the PVCs from occurring

PREMATURE ATRIAL CONTRACTIONS (PACs)

Premature Atrial Contractions or PACs are like PVCs but they are an abnormal contraction that begins in the atria or upper chambers of your heart. Like PVCs, PACs also occur sooner than the expected regular heartbeat. In the same way that PVCs disrupt the normal heartbeat, PACs also disrupt your normal heartbeat. Because of their similarities, the symptoms of PVCs and PACs are indistinguishable from one another.

Symptoms:

- Fluttering or Palpitations
- Feeling of skipped/missed beat

Causes:

- Stress
- Stimulants: Caffeine, Tobacco, Alcohol
- Underlying Heart Disease: Hypertension, Valve disorder, Previous MI
- Abnormal blood levels of magnesium and/or potassium
- Digitalis toxicity

As with PVCs, PACs are very common and occur in normal health individuals. Stress or stimulants can increase the frequency of PACs. In some cases, PACs can be a sign of underlying heart condition in the atrium associated with hypertension or valvular condition.

Diagnosis:

- As with PVCs your doctor will diagnosis PACs by evaluating your heart rhythm on an ECG or by having you wear a heart monitor

Treatment:

- The majority of PACs are benign and require little to no treatment
- In rare cases, where the PACs are potentially a sign of underlying heart condition, these conditions should be ruled out with appropriate evaluation
- As with PVCs, treatment is geared toward symptoms. If PACs are frequent & symptomatic, medications can be used to suppress the PACs, such as beta blockers or calcium channel blockers.