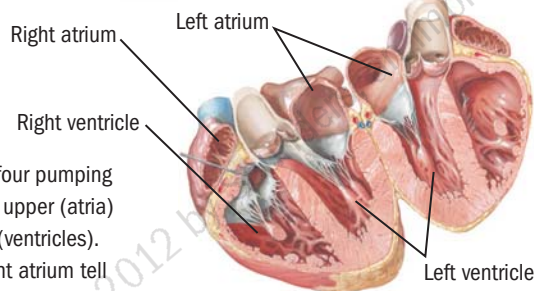


MANAGING YOUR PREMATURE VENTRICULAR CONTRACTIONS

Premature ventricular contractions (PVCs) are extra, abnormal heartbeats in the ventricles that occur too early. PVCs are very common and can happen in healthy people.



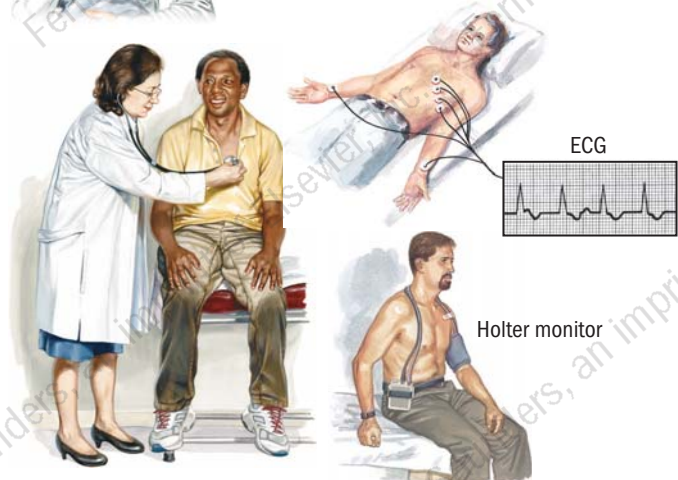
The heart has four pumping chambers, two upper (atria) and two lower (ventricles). Cells in the right atrium tell the ventricles to contract.



The most common causes are caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and stress. Other causes are heart disease, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, medicines, and illegal drugs.



Most people don't have symptoms. Some have a feeling of the heart missing a beat followed by a stronger beat. Other symptoms are heart fluttering, palpitations, a sensation of heart pounding, and jumping.



Your doctor may find an irregular pulse during a physical examination. ECG, Holter monitoring, exercise stress testing, echocardiography, and an electrophysiology study may also be done.

What Are Premature Ventricular Contractions (PVCs)?

The heart has four pumping chambers, two upper ones (atria) and two lower ones (ventricles). Cells in the right atrium normally control heartbeats. Electrical impulses go from the atria to the ventricles and make them contract and pump blood from the heart to the body. Premature ventricular contractions (PVCs) are extra, abnormal heartbeats in the ventricles that occur too early in the rhythm sequence. These heartbeats don't work well in pumping blood through the body. This condition is known as an arrhythmia, a disorder of the heart's regular beating rhythm. The abnormal heartbeats will result in an irregular pulse.

PVCs are very common and occur in most people at some point. They can happen in otherwise healthy people and are usually harmless. Most people with PVCs don't need treatment.

What Causes PVCs?

The most common causes among healthy people are caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and stress. Heart disease such as ischemia (reduced blood flow to the heart muscle), high blood pressure, congestive heart failure (reduced pumping of the heart), medicines, and illegal drugs are other causes.

What Are the Symptoms of PVCs?

Most people don't have symptoms. Some have a feeling of the heart missing a beat followed by a stronger beat. Other symptoms are fluttering, palpitations (irregular or rapid heartbeat), a sensation of heart pounding, and jumping.

How Are PVCs Diagnosed?

The doctor may find an irregular pulse during a physical examination. The doctor will diagnose PVCs by doing electrocardiography (ECG). The ECG records the heart's electrical activity. The test is best done while symptoms are occurring. Other tests include Holter monitoring. The Holter monitor records an ECG for 24 hours. Exercise stress testing may also be done. This test lets the doctor see effects of exercise on the heart's rhythms. Other tests are echocardiography (a type of ultrasound test that uses sound waves) and an electrophysiology study (checks the heart's electrical system). This test is done by a heart specialist (cardiologist).



Healthy people with no symptoms need no treatment. Limiting or avoiding caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and stress can make PVCs occur less often. Medicines can control PVCs if symptoms become severe.

Exercise can help people who are inactive. An exercise stress test can be used to make sure that you can exercise safely.

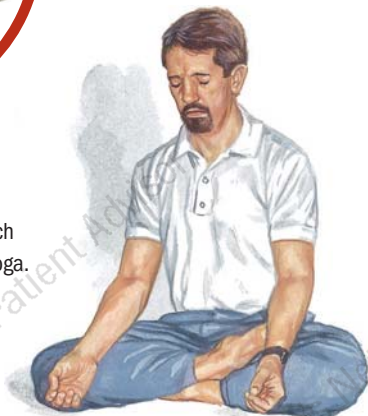


Reduce exposure to PVC triggers, such as caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, and stress.

Try stress reduction methods, such as biofeedback, meditation, or yoga.



Call your doctor if you have palpitations, chest pain, shortness of breath, or fainting.



How Are PVCs Treated?

Healthy people with no symptoms need no treatment. The condition may go away on its own. Limiting or avoiding caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and stress can make PVCs become less frequent. Medicines can control PVCs if symptoms become severe. These drugs include antiarrhythmic medicines, beta-blockers, and calcium channel blockers. Exercise can help people who are inactive.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing PVCs:

- ✓ **DO** reduce exposure to PVC triggers, such as caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, and stress.
- ✓ **DO** try stress reduction methods, such as biofeedback, meditation, or yoga.
- ✓ **DO** exercise. People with PVCs can usually exercise safely. PVCs may even stop during exercise. If PVCs increase in frequency with exercise, you may have heart disease. An exercise stress test can be used to make sure that you can exercise safely.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have palpitations, chest pain, shortness of breath, or fainting.
- ⊘ **DON'T** forget to take your prescribed medicines.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Heart Association
Tel: (800) 242-8721
Website: <http://www.americanheart.org>
- American College of Cardiology
Tel: (800) 253-4636
Website: <http://www.acc.org>