Premature Ventricular Contractions, PVCs
Premature Atrial Contractions, PACs

Normal Heart

The heart is an electrical pump. The SA (sinoatrial node), also known as the heart’s natural pacemaker, controls the heart rate; The SA node fires and the atria contract. The AV (atrioventricular) node then collects this impulse and sends it to the lower chambers of the heart to contract.

In premature ventricular contractions (PVC), there is a place of electricity in the lower chambers of the heart (ventricles). This place causes an early heartbeat before the SA node would normally send a signal.

In premature atrial contractions (PAC), there is a spot of electricity in the upper chambers of the heart (atria). This spot causes an early heartbeat before the SA node would normally send a signal.

Signs and Symptoms

Older children and adults will describe that their hearts feel like they skip or miss a beat. They may feel forceful heartbeats. Some may not feel these extra beats.

Some people find that stress, caffeine, alcohol, or certain medicines increase how often the extra heartbeats occur.

Testing

A member of the health care team will do a complete exam and a health history.

An electrocardiogram (ECG) will be done to look at the heart’s electrical activity. A Holter monitor may be used to find out how often these extra beats occur. The Holter is worn for 24 or 48 hours. It records every heartbeat during that time. An event monitor may be done to find out what the heart rhythm is when there are symptoms. An event monitor is worn for 30 days. A button is pushed when you feel an abnormal heartbeat.
Sometimes, an exercise test is needed to find out if the extra heartbeats occur more or less often during exercise.

**Treatment**

Often no treatment is needed. If the extra heartbeats do not cause any distress and do not happen often, then no treatment is needed. Some people are bothered by the feeling of extra heartbeats. Certain medicines can then be used. For others, if the extra heartbeats occur often or occur more often during exercise, further testing and treatment may be needed.

**Who Do I Call With Questions?**

The doctor or nurse or our clinic staff can answer any questions.

Pediatric Cardiology *(608) 263-6420*

Adult Congenital Heart Disease *(608) 890-5700*