

PALPITATIONS: BENIGN

You had PALPITATIONS today. This is a feeling that your heart is racing, pounding or beating irregular. There are many causes for palpitations, some are serious and some are benign (not serious). Your doctor believes that in your case, your symptoms are not due to any serious condition.

Palpitations can occur in otherwise healthy persons who have used excessive amounts of stimulants such as tobacco or caffeine (coffee, tea, cola or medicines containing caffeine). Also certain over-the-counter cold & sinus remedies, as well as diet pills can over-stimulate the heart. Obviously, cocaine and amphetamine are the most powerful heart stimulants and must be avoided.

Occasionally, brief spells of palpitations occur in a healthy person for no apparent reason.

HOME CARE:

You may resume your normal activities.

If your doctor told you that your symptoms were due to excess stimulants, you should avoid ALL the stimulants mentioned above. If you have trouble eliminating coffee, switch to decaf. Smokers should make every effort to stop or at least switch to a filtered low-nicotine type of cigarette while you look for a Stop-Smoking program. Hoag hospital has a very good one.

If another episode of palpitations occurs, and is constant for more than 15 seconds, lie down, remain calm and wait for it to pass. These spells usually pass within a few minutes.

If it does not pass soon, and it feels like your heart is beating fast, you may be able to slow your heart down as follows:

Sit or lie down.

Take a deep breath and hold it.

Now, bear down hard with your stomach muscles, as if you were trying to have a bowel movement.

Strain hard for five seconds this way.

If this does not stop your symptoms, wait for at least one minute and try a second time

RETURN PROMPTLY or contact your doctor if any of the following occur:

If the fast or pounding heart beat recurs and lasts continuously more than 30 minutes

If you develop chest pain or **chest tightness, become clammy or sweaty**, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness or fainting.

(Created 09/02)



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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