

Heart Arrhythmias

Ventricular Tachycardia

Ventricular tachycardia (VT)

This is caused by abnormal electrical signals in the lower chambers of the heart. A faster heart rate can start suddenly and last a few seconds, or go on for longer. VT can occur in a heart that is otherwise healthy, or can occur due to damage caused by heart disease. VT in an otherwise normal heart can stop by itself and may not be serious, but it is a more serious condition if it occurs with heart disease, and can be life threatening. The rapid heartbeat means that the heart doesn't have enough time to fill with blood before it pumps. This can mean that other parts of the body do not get the blood they need to work properly.

Some people do not experience any symptoms, but when symptoms are present they can include:



- Fast heartbeat



- Dizziness or fainting



- Chest pain



- Shortness of breath



- Cardiac arrest

Treatment is not always needed, particularly if you do not have heart disease or if your episodes pass quickly. If you need treatment, this could include:



- **Medicines:** Anti-arrhythmic medicine or a beta blocker may be prescribed. Anti-arrhythmic medicines help maintain or restore a normal heart rhythm, while beta blockers slow the heart rate, which can help improve symptoms including palpitations and fatigue.



- **Implantable cardiac defibrillator (ICD):** If your VT lasts for a long time or is life threatening, you may need to have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) implanted. This device can treat arrhythmias when they occur, and has the benefit of reducing risk of death. Risks of having an ICD include: infection when having the device surgically implanted, damage to blood vessels caused by the ICD leads, blood leaking through the heart valve where the ICD lead is



placed, and lung collapse. There is also a small chance that the device may fail before it is due to be replaced, or that the ICD leads may move within the body and another surgery may be needed to put them back in place. Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of this treatment with you. Having an ICD can help prevent cardiac arrest and improve your quality of life.



- **Catheter Ablation:** In this procedure, heat or cold energy is used to destroy the tissues that create the abnormal signals. Risks of ablation can include: infection after surgery, damage to blood vessels or heart valves, a new or worsening arrhythmia, blood clots, stroke or heart attack. Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of this treatment with you. Although there are a number of possible risks, the procedure is generally considered low risk, and can be done with an overnight stay or as a day procedure. It is generally used as a second treatment option in people with VT who already have an ICD.





Hearts4heart supports, educates and advocates for Australians living with atrial fibrillation and other heart conditions. Join our community and the conversation.

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