

Palpitations

WHAT ARE PALPITATIONS?

Palpitations are the sensation you feel when your heart beats. It may be normal beating, beating hard, beating fast or racing, or skipping or fluttering.

HOW DO WE FIGURE OUT IF PALPITATIONS ARE AN ARRHYTHMIA?

Recording the heart rhythm during an episode of palpitations would be ideal, but capturing events with an EKG is admittedly not cost-effective for all patients, especially when the events are not frequent. Sometimes simply getting a better handle on the heart rate and logging the frequency and duration of episodes, which can inform us whether this is a clinically significant event and worth recording. There are various options, which fall into two broad categories:

1. Track and log heart rate
 1. manually count the pulse (which can be challenging for many families), or
 2. with technology (e.g. free phone apps, FitBit).
2. Track and log heart rate and EKG rhythm
 1. with 24-48 hour continuous "Holter" monitor, or
 2. with 30-day patient triggered event monitor, or
 3. with 14-day Zio patch monitor (not covered by all insurance), or
 4. with a personal commercial monitor (e.g. Kardia AliveCor, or latest generation of Apple Watch)

Talk with your physician about these options and share in the decision-making.

IN THE SHORT TERM, WHAT DO WE DO IF MY CHILD HAS A PROLONGED EPISODE?

Most kids will tolerate most arrhythmias without any significant issues or medical instability.

- 1) If s/he is in a safe place and has few symptoms, s/he should capture the event with a monitor if you have one.
- 2) Then try vagal maneuvers. Examples of vagal maneuvers include:
 - a) Attempt to blow up the thumb: putting your thumb in your mouth and blow hard, without letting any air actually escape.
 - b) Hold breath and bear down ("Valsalva maneuver")
 - c) Cough
 - d) Carotid (neck) massage (one side at a time).
 - e) Headstand (supported by someone else)
 - f) Attempt to pick up an unmovable object.
- 3) If an episode lasts longer than about 15-20 minutes and vagal maneuvers are not effective, s/he should seek medical care at the closest emergency room.



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