

Supraventricular Tachycardia: What You Should Know

What is supraventricular tachycardia?

Supraventricular tachycardia (SOO-prah-ven-TRIK-u-lar tak-eh-KAR-dee-ah), or SVT, is a condition that causes your heart to beat faster than it should.

What are the symptoms?

You might feel fluttering or tightness in your chest. You may also be short of breath or dizzy. The symptoms of SVT are like symptoms of anxiety, so it is important to talk to your doctor to find out if you have SVT. Call your doctor right away if your symptoms last longer than a couple of minutes, you have them a lot, you get new symptoms, or the symptoms are bad enough that you think you may pass out.

How is it diagnosed?

SVT is usually diagnosed using a test called an electrocardiogram, or ECG. An ECG can be done in your doctor's office or a hospital. But, the ECG may not show SVT if your heart is not beating fast at the time of the test. Your doctor might record your heartbeat over a few days with a monitor you can bring home.

How is it treated?

When you have SVT and your heart is beating too fast, your doctor can treat it with medicine or an electric shock to bring your heartbeat back to normal. Your doctor might ask you to hold your breath and strain like you are trying to have a bowel movement, or dunk your face in ice water, because sometimes doing these things alone will slow your heartbeat.

Can I prevent more SVT episodes?

If you have SVT, you should stop or limit your use of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, and street drugs.

If SVT happens more than a few times a year, your doctor may prescribe medicine or refer you to a heart doctor.

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