# A red heart with text on a black background

# Your heart rate

Your heart rate (also known as your pulse rate) is the number of times your heart beats per minute (bpm). Everyone’s heart rate is different and can change over time.

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A normal adult heart rate is between 60 and 100 bpm while resting. Your heart rate can change every minute and what’s ‘normal’ is different for everyone because of their age and health. Your lifestyle - such as whether you smoke, exercise and how much alcohol you drink - also affects your heart rate.

You can find your normal resting heart rate by counting the number of times your heart beats in a minute. Sitting still for 5 to 10 minutes before counting makes sure your heart is in its resting state. Knowing your normal heart rate when living with your heart condition can help you feel more confident and improve your quality of life.

**What’s a dangerous heart rate?**

An arrhythmia (or heart rhythm issue) is when the heart beats too slowly, too quickly, or irregularly. An arrhythmia can be dangerous because blood is not pumped well enough around the body causing symptoms like dizziness, fainting and shortness of breath. An abnormal heart rate could also increase the risk of stroke.

It’s estimated that more than 2 million people in the UK experience heart rhythm issues. Most of them will be able to lead normal lives.

**Fast heart rate (tachycardia)**

A resting heart rate above 100 bpm is too fast for most people. A fast heart rate, also known as tachycardia, can be caused by health conditions. These conditions can include infection, anaemia (a lack of red blood cells carrying oxygen in your blood) and an overactive thyroid (where too many hormones are made).

If you are experiencing symptoms or have a fast-resting heart rate you should make an appointment with your GP. Symptoms to look out for include:

* fainting
* feeling very tired
* dizziness
* palpitations (noticing your heartbeat which can feel like a pounding or fluttering sensation).

**Slow heart rate (bradycardia)**

A heart rate below 60 bpm while resting is too slow for most people. A slow heart rate, also known as bradycardia, can be normal for people like athletes who are very fit.

If you have a slow heart rate and are experiencing symptoms like fainting and tiredness, you should make an appointment with your GP.

**Exercise and your heart rate**

Your heart, like any other muscle, needs physical activity to keep it healthy. Regular exercise improves overall health by helping manage many of the risk factors for heart and circulatory diseases, such as diabetes. Regular exercise also boosts energy and mood, as well as quality of sleep.

It’s normal for your heart rate to increase while exercising. During exercise, you should aim to stay within your target heart rate (THR) to increase your fitness safely. Your THR is between 50% and 70% of your maximum heart rate.

If you have a heart condition, ask your GP or specialist about a safe heart rate when you're exercising. It may be helpful to do the ‘talk test’ while you are exercising. The talk test: if you can talk while being active, feel warm and are breathing a little more heavily than normal, you're moving at the right pace.

**How do I measure my heart rate?**

You can measure your heart rate yourself, by checking your pulse.

**How to check your pulse**

Firstly, find your pulse on your wrist.

1. Put one of your hands out so you’re looking at your palm.
2. Use the first finger (your index finger) and middle finger of your other hand and place the pads of these fingers on the inside of your wrist, at the base of your thumb.
3. Press lightly and feel the pulse. If you can’t feel anything press slightly harder.
4. Once you’ve found your pulse, continue to feel it for about 30 seconds. Check to see if it feels regular or irregular.

You can work out your heart rate in beats per minute (bpm) by:

* counting the number of beats in your pulse after 60 seconds, or
* counting the beats for 6 seconds and multiplying by 10.

If your pulse feels irregular, you should check for a full 60 seconds. If you're concerned, talk to your GP.

You may find it useful to buy a heart rate monitor which measures your heart rate for you. There are different types available that measure things like how many steps you take throughout the day and your quality of sleep.

Heart rate monitors can be found in most big high street shops and department stores, including larger supermarkets and pharmacies. Ask a professional at your local pharmacy and they can help you pick the right heart rate monitor for you.

Heart rate monitors are a good way to help you look after your health. However, they cannot be used to diagnose any conditions. Speak to your doctor if you notice unusual patterns or have symptoms.

**If you have a heart condition**

Some medicines, such as beta blockers, are used to treat heart conditions and can help control your heart rate by slowing it down. Check with your doctor about the medication you’re taking and how it helps control your heart rate. Your doctor can also tell you what your normal heart rate should be and what symptoms to look out for with your heart condition.

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