



Arrhythmias in Pregnancy

1.0 WHAT IS IT?

An arrhythmia is an abnormal heart rhythm that may be too fast (tachycardia), too slow (bradycardia), or irregular. It can come from the upper (atria) or lower (ventricles) heart chambers. Types include supraventricular tachycardia (SVT), atrial flutter, atrial fibrillation, and ventricular tachycardia. Arrhythmias are usually detected by ECG or a Holter monitor. They may be present before pregnancy or appear for the first time during it, especially in women with heart disease. Symptoms can include palpitations, dizziness, or fainting, though some arrhythmias cause no symptoms. Treatment ranges from no therapy to medications or, for severe cases, electrical cardioversion to restore normal rhythm.

2.0 HOW SAFE IS IT FOR ME TO BECOME PREGNANT?

Pregnancy can stress the heart and this can contribute to the development of arrhythmias in some women. The impact depends on the type of arrhythmia and whether you have heart disease. Most fast rhythms from the upper chambers (supraventricular) are not dangerous, but atrial fibrillation and flutter can increase the risk of stroke and may require blood thinners during pregnancy. Ventricular arrhythmias are more serious and can be life-threatening. If you have a heart condition, talk to a heart specialist before becoming pregnant to make sure it is safe for you.

3.0 ISSUES FOR THE MOTHER

Very short episodes of arrhythmia usually do not affect the mother or baby. Longer episodes can cause palpitations, dizziness, chest discomfort, or shortness of breath, and in rare cases may lead to fainting or collapse. The risk depends on the type and duration of the arrhythmia.

4.0 ISSUES FOR THE BABY

Long episodes of abnormal heart rhythms, especially those causing fainting or collapse in the mother, can also affect the unborn baby.



**Canadian
Cardio-Obstetrics
Network (CanCOB)**

5.0 MEDICAL CARE DURING PREGNANCY AND DELIVERY

If you have arrhythmias before or during pregnancy, you should see a heart specialist who will decide if high-risk pregnancy care is needed and how often you should be monitored.

During pregnancy, your heart specialist will schedule check-ups and tests such as ECG, echocardiogram, or Holter monitoring. Report any symptoms like palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, or chest pain promptly. If symptoms are severe and your doctor is unavailable, go to the emergency department. Some women may need heart monitoring (telemetry) during labour and delivery.