First Degree Atrioventricular Block
(1st Degree Heart Block)

First degree atrioventricular block is a type of heart block. The heartbeat is a coordinated contraction between the upper and lower chambers of the heart. This coordinated contraction happens because of an electrical impulse that is sent from the upper chambers of the heart to the lower chambers of the heart. The electrical impulse causes the heart to beat and pump blood. Normally, this electrical impulse is transmitted without delay. A first degree heart block is a slight delay of this electrical impulse transmission from the upper chambers of the heart to the lower chambers of the heart. People who have a first degree heart block do not normally have problems.

1st Degree Heart Block

CAUSES

The cause of first degree heart block may be a result of:

- Age. The heart's electrical system can slow due to the aging process.
- Heart attack. A heart attack can cause scarring which can damage the heart's electrical system.
- Heart medication such as beta blockers or calcium channel blockers. These kinds of medications can slow the electrical impulse transmission of the heart which may affect the heart rate.
- Open heart surgery can affect the electrical pathway of the heart.

SYMPTOMS

- A first degree heart block does not normally have symptoms.
- Most people cannot tell they have a first degree heart block.

DIAGNOSIS

- An electrocardiogram (EKG) is often used to diagnose first degree heart block. An EKG is a tracing of the heartbeat.

TREATMENT

- A first degree heart block does not normally need treatment.
- People who have a first degree heart block do not need a pacemaker.
- Heart medications such as beta blockers or calcium channel blockers can slow the heart rate. Your caregiver may need to adjust your heart medication if this is the cause of your heart block.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You feel your heart skipping beats or your heart beats very fast.
- You feel more tired than normal.
- You notice swelling in your lower legs.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have severe chest pain, especially if the pain is crushing or pressure-like and spreads to the arms, back, neck, or jaw. **THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. Do not wait to see if the pain will go away. Get medical help at once. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). DO NOT drive yourself to the hospital.**
- You notice increasing shortness of breath during rest, sleeping, or with activity.
- You "black out" or faint.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.

- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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