



# Ectopic Beats

## Information sheet for practitioners

### BACKGROUND

Ectopic beats are extra or missed beats that are very common but sometimes cause a lot of distress and symptoms for patients. The ectopic beats can originate from the atrial or ventricular chambers. There is an increased prevalence of ectopic beats post COVID19 and post COVID19 vaccination but this usually gradually subsides over 6-12 months without any specific treatment. Ectopic beat frequency and burden increase with age and most people over the age of 40 experience some ectopic beats. In terms of symptoms, ectopic beats tend to occur in waves that last a few weeks and then spontaneously subside.

### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms associated with ectopic beats include: skipped beats, missed beats and intermittent sharp stabbing pains. Often the symptoms are more prominent during the night-time and when lying on the left side. Ectopic beats are not dangerous but in some instances they can be associated with underlying heart problems so the basic workup usually includes an echocardiogram and Holter monitor as well as blood tests for electrolyte levels.

The following medical conditions are sometimes associated conditions

- Sleep apnea
- Obesity
- Thyrotoxicosis
- Iron deficiency or excess
- Heart failure
- Cardiomyopathy
- Ischemic heart disease
- Anxiety disorders
- Anemia

### PULSE OXIMETERS, APPLE WATCH, SAMSUNG WATCH, WEARABLES

These devices are sometimes 'tricked' by ectopic beats and might incorrectly measure a low heart rate of 30 or 40bpm. This occurs because the ectopic beats often occur soon after a 'normal' heartbeat so there is not enough blood in the heart chamber to be pumped out and result in a pulse at the wrist. If the ectopic beats occur in certain patterns (called bigeminy or trigeminy) the wearable might record a low heart rate for a prolonged period of time.

### HOLTER MONITOR FINDINGS

Your CloudHolter Holter report will quantify the 'burden = total number' of atrial and ventricular ectopic beats. Virtually everyone has some ectopic beats and short runs of ectopics which are sometimes referred to as 'atrial runs' in the report. We define a low burden as <5000 ectopics per 24 hours, moderate burden as 5000-9999 ectopics per 24 hours, a high burden as 10000-19999 ectopics per 24 hours and very high burden as >20000 per 24 hours.

### MANAGEMENT OF ECTOPICS

There are three main aspects:

1. Re-assurance and explanation of test findings
2. Lifestyle - Avoidance measures, exercise prescription, cognitive behaviour therapy
3. Very rarely catheter ablation is considered for very high burden monomorphic ectopics

I advise against beta-blockers and anti-arrhythmics as the side-effects are often worse than the problem.

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