



COUNTING YOUR PULSE

Patient Information

Your pulse is the beat of your heart. You can feel it in several parts of your body, including the inside of your wrist or the carotid artery, which is high in your neck.

Counting your pulse is the best way you can monitor your own heart rate. By counting your pulse, you know how many times your heart beats in 1 minute and how regular the beats are.

You may need to count your pulse for several reasons: (1) you may have an irregular heartbeat; (2) you may be taking a special drug to control irregular heartbeats, and you need to be sure it is working; (3) you may have a pacemaker; or (4) you may need to check your heart rate as part of an exercise program.

How to take your pulse.

To count accurately, you need a clock or watch with a second hand. You can use the pulse on your wrist or neck, whichever is easier for you.

To find the pulse on your wrist, press the fingertips of your index and middle fingers on the inside of your wrist (thumb side). Do not use your thumb. If you have trouble finding this pulse, move your fingertips around until you locate it.

To find the pulse in your neck, press your fingertips in the area just under the jawbone, alongside your Adam's apple.

If you have trouble finding either pulse, try varying the pressure. You can miss the pulse by pressing too lightly, but pressing too hard can obscure the pulse. Once you have found your pulse, it will be easy the next time.

Taking your pulse while resting.

Your resting pulse can be taken almost any time, except after exercising, eating a large meal, or taking prescribed drugs that control heart rate.

Sit quietly for 2 minutes and relax. Find your pulse, look at the second hand on your watch or clock, and begin counting.

If you have an irregular heartbeat, you must count for exactly 60 seconds. For example, if you counted 77 pulse beats in 1 minute, this is your heart rate. Otherwise, you can count for 30 seconds and multiply by 2. For example, 41 pulses in 30 seconds $\times 2 = 82$ pulse beats per minute. Take your pulse as often as your doctor instructs.

Taking your pulse after exercising.

Your pulse rate during exercise can tell you whether you are getting the most benefits from your exercise program. Your doctor will give you a "target heart rate". This is how fast your heart should beat after exercising. If your pulse is lower than your target heart rate, you need to exercise harder next time.

As soon as you stop exercising, locate your pulse and look at the second hand on your watch or clock. Count the beats for 6 seconds and add a zero. For example, if you counted 12, your heart rate is 120.

You should not count your exercising rate for a full minute. Because your heart slows down quickly when you stop exercising, counting for a full minute gives a lower rate.

