

Supraventricular tachycardia

What is supraventricular tachycardia?

Supraventricular tachycardia (“soo-prah-ven-**trick**-you-lar tack-ee-**card**-ee-yah,” or SVT) is the most common type of tachycardia (fast heart beat). It is caused by “a short circuit in the wiring” of the heart. It can start without warning, and last a few seconds to a few hours.

This sheet lists some of the signs that may indicate your child is having SVT, and some ways to help it stop. Use this sheet **only** under the guidance of a cardiologist.

What are the signs of tachycardia?

Signs of SVT will vary with age, how fast the heart is beating, and how long the episode lasts. Most children will have some of these signs:

- irritability lasting several hours that does not respond to usual comfort measures
- pale or blotchy skin color
- sweating
- rapid breathing
- crabby, withdrawn, does not want to talk
- heart rate faster than you may be able to count - more than 200 beats per minute
- poor feeding

What can I do for my child?

If you think your child might be having a fast heartbeat, count your child’s pulse. (See “How do I take a pulse?” on page 2.)

If the heart rate is more than 200 beats per minute, try some of the following ideas. They may help your child come out of the SVT and back to a normal heart rate.

For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

- Place ice in a bag and hold firmly over the nose and mouth for 20 seconds.
- Insert a thermometer into the rectum to stimulate “bearing down” as if to have a bowel movement.

For school-age children and teens

- Bear down and hold your breath as if having a bowel movement.
- Hold a bag of ice over your face for 20 to 30 seconds.
- Put your thumb in your mouth, make a seal with your lips, and blow hard.

If these do not work, have your child rest for a while; then try again. If symptoms persist or your child appears very ill, call your cardiologist immediately.

Keep a record

To help evaluate your child’s SVT you may be asked to keep a diary for a month or two. Helpful information includes:

- time of day the tachycardia started
- what your child was doing when tachycardia began
- whether it started suddenly or gradually
- whether it stopped suddenly or gradually
- how long it lasted
- what you did to make it go away
- the heart rate (this is important, so have someone take your child’s pulse if possible)

How do I take a pulse?

Practice this skill until you can do it easily, and so you know how your child's normal pulse feels.

1. Find the pulse in one of these ways:
 - Use your index and middle fingers to feel the pulse on the thumb side of the wrist of an older child.
 - Feel the pulse with your hand on the child's chest.
 - Listen to the chest.
2. Count the number of heartbeats for 15 seconds.
3. Multiply that number by 4 to get the rate per minute.

What else do I need to know?

Some children require medications to manage and control SVT. Discuss this condition and share this education sheet with your child's school nurse and teacher. Ask them to watch for signs of tachycardia, take the child's pulse, and write it down for you.

When should I call the cardiology clinic?

- SVT does not stop with the tips in this sheet
- your child has frequent SVT, even if you can get it to stop
- if your child seems increasingly uncomfortable

Call 911 if your child:

- is very pale
- can't stand up
- has a weak cry
- feels cool to the touch
- faints or feels dizzy
- has trouble breathing

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call the cardiologist. Please have this information handy:

Cardiologist: _____

Phone: _____

Current medicine(s): _____