

Holiday Heart Syndrome

Holiday heart syndrome is a real diagnosis that predominately occurs in the United States and is a common cause of cardiac disease. A 2017 article published in *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews* noted that alcohol does not allow the heart to contract appropriately. Additionally, in 2021, researchers published a study in *Clinical Autonomic Research* that said just small amounts of alcohol can lead “to an increase in sympathetic (“fight or flight”) activity and a decrease in parasympathetic (“rest and digest”) activity, resulting in an autonomic imbalance—meaning that the heart rate will start to get higher. Holiday heart syndrome is also referred to as alcohol induced atrial arrhythmias and is characterized by an acute cardiac arrhythmia associated with heavy ethanol consumption in a person without other clinical evidence of heart disease. Fortunately, holiday heart syndrome is reversible with early diagnosis and cessation of alcohol consumption.



What Does Holiday Heart Syndrome Feel Like?

Holiday heart syndrome can occur suddenly with symptoms of heart palpitations and arrhythmia. Other symptoms can include: chest pain, sweating, anxiety, shortness of breath, and fainting. Stroke and cardiac arrest can also occur in people with holiday heart syndrome with a heightened risk for dilated cardiomyopathy (a condition in which the heart becomes enlarged and cannot pump blood effectively), rhabdomyolysis (a condition in which damaged skeletal muscle breaks down rapidly), and acute kidney injury (a sudden decrease in kidney function).

How is Holiday Heart Syndrome Treated?

If your overall health is good, a doctor will treat your arrhythmia (possibly with a beta-blocker or a calcium channel blocker) and suggest you stop drinking. If your health isn't the best or unstable, a doctor will likely order a cardioversion (chemical or electrical).

Tips to Avoiding Holiday Heart Syndrome

- If you have a known heart condition, it is best to follow your doctor's recommendations regarding alcohol consumption.
- Set limits on what you will eat and drink before arriving at a holiday party. Also, eat a healthy meal before attending any party so that you are not tempted to overindulge.
- Drink one or two glasses of water between each alcoholic beverage.
- Keep up healthy habits. Make a pact with yourself that you will do something good for yourself everyday—like exercising, getting enough sleep, and eating well balanced meals.
- Be careful with medications. After a night of drinking, you may be tempted to reach for a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) to ease symptoms. However, NSAIDs can actually put additional stress on your heart, raise your blood pressure, and put you at risk for heart issues.
- Most importantly, listen to your body and seek immediate medical care if experiencing any unusual symptoms. People tend to ignore symptoms because they don't want to miss a family event, but the consequences could be much worse.

