

# Heart Health



# Understanding Heart Palpitations

Heart palpitations can be unsettling. Many people describe them as fluttering, pounding or skipped beats.

While these sensations can feel alarming, they are often harmless. Still, palpitations sometimes signal an underlying health issue, so understanding what causes them and when to seek medical attention is important for protecting long-term heart health.

## COMMON CAUSES OF PALPITATIONS

Most heart palpitations are triggered by everyday factors rather than serious heart problems. Stress and anxiety are among the most common causes. When the body releases stress hormones, the heart may beat faster or harder in response. Caffeine, nicotine and alcohol can stimulate the heart and make palpitations more noticeable.

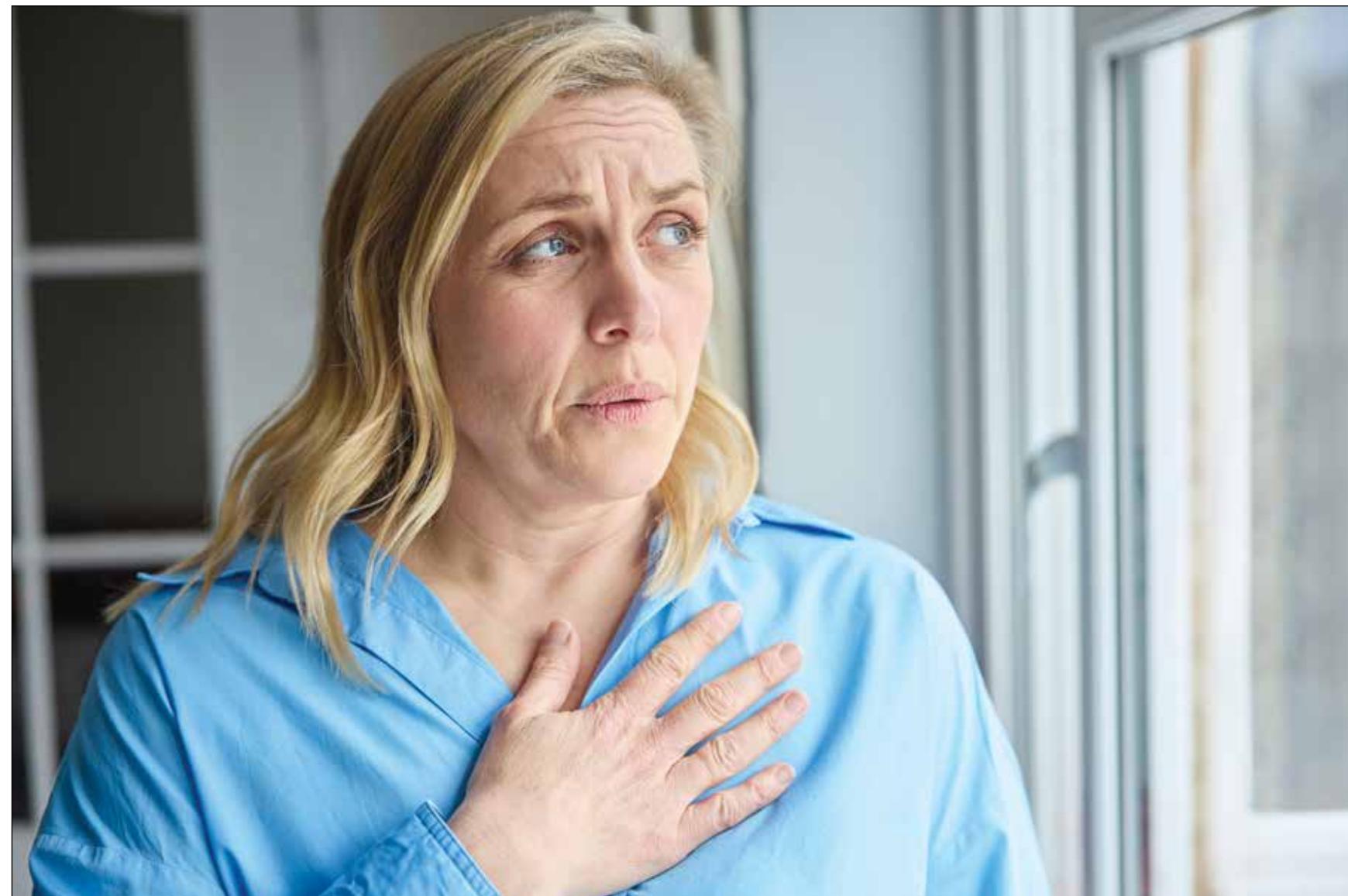
Exercise and dehydration can contribute as well. During vigorous activity, the heart naturally beats faster, and slight rhythm changes can feel like fluttering. Low hydration affects electrolyte levels, which play a role in maintaining a steady heartbeat.

Certain medications may cause palpitations, including some cold remedies, inhalers and thyroid medications. Hormonal changes, especially during pregnancy or menopause, can affect heart rhythm.

In many cases, palpitations occur without any clear pattern. Brief episodes that come and go, especially during stressful moments or after consuming caffeine, are usually not a cause for concern.

## WHEN PALPITATIONS ARE HARMLESS

Harmless palpitations typically last



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only a few seconds and resolve on their own. These sensations often improve by reducing triggers such as caffeine, managing stress or getting adequate rest.

Palpitations that occur occasionally and do not come with other symptoms are usually not dangerous. Keeping track of when they happen and what you were doing at the time can help identify possible causes.

## WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE

While palpitations are often benign, certain signs indicate the need for medical evaluation. Palpitations that are frequent, last for long periods or occur along with dizziness, chest pain or

shortness of breath should be checked by a health care provider. These symptoms may point to arrhythmias or other heart conditions that require treatment.

Discuss with a provider any palpitations that occur after starting a new medication or supplement. Some substances can affect heart rhythm or interact with existing prescriptions.

Individuals with a history of heart disease, high blood pressure or thyroid problems should be cautious about new or worsening palpitations. If palpitations wake you from sleep, occur with fainting or include a rapid, irregular heartbeat that does not slow down, medical care is recommended.

## SUPPORTING A HEALTHY HEART RHYTHM

For most people, simple lifestyle changes can help reduce palpitations. Limiting caffeine and alcohol, staying hydrated and managing stress through exercise or relaxation techniques can make a noticeable difference. Getting enough sleep supports overall heart function, and avoiding smoking reduces strain on the cardiovascular system.

If palpitations are bothersome or persistent, a health care provider may recommend tests such as an EKG, blood work or a wearable monitor. These tools can help identify irregular rhythms or rule out more serious causes.

# A Heart-Healthy Home

Most people think of heart health in terms of diet, exercise and medical care, but the home environment also plays an important role.

Indoor air quality, ventilation, dust levels and chemical exposure can all influence cardiovascular well-being.

With a few simple adjustments, homeowners can create a living space that supports a healthier heart. A heart-healthy home environment is built through small, consistent actions. These changes create a cleaner, more comfortable place to live, supporting overall well-being for everyone in the household.

## IMPROVING VENTILATION AND AIRFLOW

Good ventilation helps remove indoor pollutants and brings in fresh air. Opening windows when weather allows is one of the easiest ways to improve airflow. Cross-ventilation, created by opening windows on opposite sides of a room, can quickly refresh stagnant air.

For homes that rely on heating or cooling systems, replacing filters regularly is essential. Clogged filters can circulate dust, pollen and other irritants that strain the lungs and heart. High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters are especially effective at reducing



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airborne particles.

Kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans also support ventilation. Using them while cooking or showering helps remove moisture and reduce mold growth, which can trigger respiratory symptoms that indirectly affect heart health.

## REDUCING HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

Many cleaning products, air fresheners and solvents release volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These chemicals can

irritate the lungs, increase inflammation and elevate stress on the cardiovascular system. Low-VOC or fragrance-free options are safer alternatives.

Safe storage is equally important. Keeping chemicals in sealed containers and storing them in garages or outdoor sheds, when possible, limits indoor exposure. When using cleaning products, ensure good airflow by opening windows or running fans.

Homeowners can reduce chemical use by choosing

simpler ingredients for everyday cleaning. Vinegar, baking soda and mild soaps can often replace harsher products and still provide effective results.

## MANAGING DUST AND ALLERGENS

Dust buildup contains particles from pet dander, pollen, hair, fabric fibers and other irritants. These materials can worsen allergies and cause low-level inflammation, which may affect heart health over time.

Vacuuming weekly with a

machine equipped with a HEPA filter helps remove fine particles. Washing bedding in hot water once a week reduces allergens. For homes with pets, grooming them regularly and keeping their beds clean can make a noticeable difference.

Dusting with microfiber cloths is more effective than traditional feather dusters, which tend to spread particles rather than capture them. Air purifiers with HEPA filters can further reduce airborne dust in high-traffic areas or bedrooms.

## PROMOTING BETTER INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Indoor air often contains pollutants from cooking, heating, smoking or outdoor sources that enter the home. Taking steps to improve air quality can benefit the heart as well as the lungs.

Avoiding indoor smoking is one of the most important measures. Tobacco smoke exposes everyone in the home to chemicals that increase heart disease risk. Even third-hand smoke residue on surfaces can linger and cause harm.

Burning candles or incense can affect air quality. If used, they should be unscented and made from clean-burning materials. Proper ventilation can help disperse smoke or fumes.

Humidity control plays a role too. High humidity encourages mold growth, while very low humidity can irritate the airways. A humidity level between 30-50% is generally recommended.

# Supporting a Loved One

When someone you care about is living with heart disease, your support can make a meaningful difference.

Heart conditions often require lifestyle changes, regular monitoring and emotional adjustment. Family members and friends can help by offering encouragement, clear communication and practical assistance that makes daily life a little easier.

## COMMUNICATING WITH CARE AND UNDERSTANDING

Open and respectful communication is one of the most important ways to support someone with heart disease. It helps to listen first. Give your loved one space to talk about fears, frustrations or concerns without jumping immediately to solutions. Acknowledging their feelings can ease stress and help them feel understood.

Asking questions gently can be helpful. Instead of offering unsolicited advice, try asking how you can assist or what changes feel most manageable for them. This respects their independence while still showing you are available.

Avoid minimizing symptoms. If your loved one mentions chest discomfort, shortness of breath or unusual fatigue, encourage them to contact a healthcare provider rather than brushing it off. Taking symptoms seriously can prevent complications and reinforces that their well-being is a priority.

## OFFERING PRACTICAL EVERYDAY SUPPORT

Heart disease management often involves regular appointments, medication schedules and lifestyle adjustments. Small acts of practical



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help can reduce stress and make these tasks easier.

Driving your loved one to medical visits or helping organize prescriptions can be especially valuable. Some people appreciate help setting up pillboxes, keeping track of refills or using apps that send reminders.

Meal planning is another area where support can make a difference. Preparing heart-healthy meals, reading labels together or trying new recipes as a team can ease the burden of dietary changes. Joining them for walks or exercise sessions can help build routine and provide companionship.

Household tasks such as cleaning, grocery shopping or yardwork may become tiring for someone with heart disease. Offering to pitch in when needed shows care without drawing attention to limitations.

## ENCOURAGING HEALTHY HABITS WITHOUT PRESSURE

Lifestyle changes are an important part of managing heart disease, but they can feel overwhelming. Encouragement works best when it is positive and collaborative rather than forceful.

Joining your loved one in their efforts can help them stay motivated.

Exercising together, cooking healthier meals as a family or reducing sodium intake as a household makes the changes feel shared rather than isolating.

Celebrating small improvements can boost confidence. Whether it is sticking with daily walks, lowering blood pressure or attending a cardiac rehab session, acknowledging progress reinforces healthy habits.

Remember that setbacks happen. Responding with patience rather than criticism helps maintain momentum and reduces stress, which is itself important for heart health.



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# Heart-Healthy Meal Prep

Maintaining a heart-friendly diet can feel challenging when schedules are packed with work, school and family responsibilities. Meal prep offers a practical way to stay on track without spending hours in the kitchen each day.

With simple planning strategies and smart food choices, it becomes easier to build meals that support cardiovascular health throughout the week.

## START WITH A SIMPLE WEEKLY PLAN

Effective meal prep begins with a clear, realistic plan. You don't need a detailed menu for every meal, but choosing a few core dishes and ingredients can streamline the process. Focus on lean proteins, whole grains and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Planning around these staples helps ensure meals stay heart healthy.

Before grocery shopping, review your schedule for the week. Identify busy days when you will want ready-to-eat

options and lighter days when you have time to cook. This helps avoid last-minute choices that may be less healthy. Buying pre-cut vegetables, frozen produce or prewashed greens can reduce prep time without sacrificing nutrition.

## BATCH COOKING MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

Batch cooking is one of the easiest ways to ensure healthy meals are available throughout the week. Preparing large portions of heart-friendly foods — such as brown rice, quinoa, roasted vegetables or grilled chicken — creates building blocks for quick meals later.

Soups, stews and bean-based dishes work well for batch cooking because they store easily and often taste better the next day. These dishes can be

portioned into containers for lunches or dinners and frozen for future use.

Cooking once and eating twice is another helpful approach. For example, roasting salmon for dinner can provide leftover protein for salads or grain bowls the next day. Preparing extra servings of vegetables makes it easy to add nutrients to any meal.

## MIX AND MATCH FOR VARIETY

Meal prep does not need to result in repetitive meals. Preparing a few versatile ingredients allows you to mix and match throughout the week. Cooked whole grains, greens, beans and lean proteins can be combined in different ways to create fresh meals.

For example, a batch of roasted vegetables can be added to salads, wraps or pasta. Cooked chicken can be used in stir-fries, sandwiches or grain bowls. Using heart-healthy seasonings such as herbs, citrus, garlic or olive oil can change the flavor profile without relying on salt.

Keeping a variety of toppings and add-ins on hand — such as nuts, seeds, avocado or chickpeas — adds both flavor and nutrients.

## PREPARE SNACKS AND BREAKFAST AHEAD OF TIME

Quick, nutritious snacks help prevent overeating later. Pre-portioning nuts, fruit, yogurt or vegetables makes them easy to grab on busy days. Hummus, whole grain crackers and berries are convenient options that support heart health.

Breakfast is another area where prep pays off. Overnight oats, whole grain muffins or egg-and-vegetable cups can be made in advance and stored in the refrigerator. These options offer a balanced start to the day and help keep blood sugar steady.

Labeling meals with dates helps ensure freshness. Most prepared dishes keep well for three to four days in the refrigerator, while cooked grains and proteins can often be frozen for longer storage.

# Seasonal Allergies and Your Heart

While most people think of seasonal allergies as a nuisance affecting the nose, throat and sinuses, allergy symptoms can also place stress on the heart.

## INFLAMMATION LINK

Seasonal allergies occur when the immune system overreacts to pollen or other airborne irritants. This reaction triggers inflammation throughout the body. For most people, the effects stay within the respiratory system, but in some cases the inflammation can have wider consequences.

Inflammation can raise heart rate and increase blood pressure, which may strain the cardiovascular system. Those with existing heart conditions, such as hypertension or coronary artery disease, may feel these effects more strongly. Shortness of breath, chest tightness or fatigue may also worsen when allergy symptoms are active.

Allergies can additionally interfere with sleep, which plays a role in heart health. Poor sleep raises stress hormones and can increase blood pressure, making it harder for the heart to rest and recover.

## HOW ANTIHISTAMINES AND MEDICATIONS PLAY A ROLE

Many people turn to over-the-counter or prescription antihistamines to manage allergy symptoms. While these medications are safe for most users, some can affect the heart.

Older antihistamines may cause drowsiness and occasionally affect heart rhythm. Decongestants found in some allergy medications can raise blood pressure and heart rate because they constrict blood vessels. For people



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with underlying heart conditions, this may present a higher risk.

Those with heart disease, high blood pressure or arrhythmias should check the active ingredients in allergy medications and consult a healthcare provider about safe options. Non-decongestant antihistamines or nasal sprays may be better choices for individuals with cardiovascular concerns.

## BREATHING CHALLENGES AND HEART STRAIN

Seasonal allergies often cause nasal congestion and wheezing, which can make it harder to breathe comfortably.

When oxygen intake decreases, even slightly, the heart may work harder to deliver oxygen throughout the body. This can be particularly noticeable for people with asthma, COPD or other respiratory conditions that overlap with allergies.

Reduced airflow may interfere with exercise routines. Some people feel more winded during outdoor activities and may unintentionally overexert themselves.

Staying aware of pollen levels and choosing lower-pollen times of day for exercise can help reduce stress on both the lungs and heart.

## MANAGING ALLERGIES SAFELY

Understanding how allergies can affect the cardiovascular system is an important part of staying healthy during spring. A few simple habits can help ease strain:

- Check pollen forecasts and limit outdoor time during peak hours.
- Shower and change clothes after being outdoors to remove pollen.
- Close windows on high-pollen days.
- Use air purifiers with HEPA filters to reduce indoor allergens.
- Seek medical advice if allergy medications cause heart palpitations or elevated blood pressure.

# Hidden Sodium Sources

Many people associate salt with the shaker on the dinner table, but most dietary sodium comes from everyday foods that don't taste particularly salty.

For individuals watching their blood pressure or trying to follow a heart-healthy lifestyle, understanding where sodium hides can make a big difference. By knowing what to watch for and using simple strategies to reduce intake, it is possible to protect heart health without giving up flavor.

## SURPRISING PLACES SODIUM SHOWS UP

Processed and packaged foods are among the biggest sources of hidden sodium. Items like bread, tortillas and breakfast cereals may not taste salty, yet manufacturers often add sodium to improve texture and extend shelf life. A single slice of bread can contain more sodium than expected, and these amounts add up quickly when eaten several times a day.

Canned soups, vegetables and beans also contain significant sodium unless labeled low sodium or no salt added. Even foods marketed as healthy or light may use salt to enhance flavor.

Meats and poultry can be another source. Many



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products are injected with sodium solutions to keep them moist during cooking. Deli meats, bacon, sausages and frozen entrees tend to be among the highest contributors.

Cheese, condiments and sauces often contain more sodium than people realize. Soy sauce, salad dressings, barbecue sauce and seasoning blends can raise sodium intake with just a few tablespoons. Some restaurant meals, especially fast food or takeout, can exceed a full

day's recommended sodium limit in a single serving.

## TIPS FOR REDUCING SODIUM WITHOUT SACRIFICING FLAVOR

Reducing sodium does not mean giving up satisfying meals. Small adjustments can make a noticeable difference without sacrificing taste.

Start by reading nutrition labels. Look for foods labeled low sodium, reduced sodium or no salt added. Comparing brands can reveal big differences in sodium levels among

similar products.

Rinsing canned beans or vegetables under water can remove some of the excess sodium. Cooking dried beans or fresh vegetables gives you full control over the salt content.

Using herbs, spices and citrus juices helps boost flavor naturally. Garlic, onion, pepper, basil, rosemary and paprika add depth without additional sodium. Others prefer ginger, cumin, curry powder and sage. Lemon or lime juice brightens dishes

and enhances flavors that salt would normally highlight.

When dining out, asking for sauces and dressings on the side allows you to control how much you use. Choosing grilled or steamed dishes instead of fried or heavily sauced options can help lower sodium intake.

Gradual reduction is often more successful than eliminating salt all at once. Taste buds adjust over time, and slowly reducing sodium helps people enjoy meals with less salt without feeling deprived.

# Traveling with Heart Conditions

Traveling can be enjoyable and rewarding, but it often requires additional planning for people with heart conditions.

Whether you are preparing for a quick weekend trip or a long-distance flight, taking a few precautions can help ensure a safe and comfortable journey.

## PLAN AHEAD WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Before making travel arrangements, speak with a health care provider. They can help assess whether you are fit for travel, recommend any necessary adjustments to medications and offer guidance tailored to your specific condition.

Obtaining a written summary of your medical history, medications and emergency contacts can be helpful. Keep this information in an easily accessible place during the trip. Identify medical facilities near your destination, especially if you will be traveling to rural areas or foreign countries.

## MANAGING MEDICATIONS ON THE GO

Pack enough medication for the entire trip plus a few extra days in case of delays. Always keep medications in carry-on luggage rather than checked



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bags so they remain accessible and protected from extreme temperatures.

Using pill organizers, reminders or smartphone apps can help maintain a consistent schedule, especially when crossing time zones. If time zone changes are significant, consult your provider about how to adjust dosing safely.

For travelers who use

nitroglycerin, inhalers or other quick-relief medications, keeping them within reach at all times is important. Make sure all prescription labels are intact, as airport security may require them.

## UNDERSTANDING FLIGHT AND ALTITUDE CONCERN

Air travel presents unique challenges for people with

heart conditions. Cabin pressure is lower at cruising altitude, which can slightly reduce oxygen levels. Most travelers with stable heart disease tolerate this well, but some may experience shortness of breath or fatigue. If supplemental oxygen is needed, airlines require advance notice and may have specific rules about approved equipment.

Long flights increase the risk of blood clots, especially for people with heart failure, arrhythmias or a history of clotting. Walking the aisles periodically, stretching your legs and staying hydrated can help reduce this risk. Compression stockings may be helpful.

If your destination is at high altitude, additional precautions may be needed. Higher elevations contain less oxygen, which can place extra strain on the heart. Travelers with coronary artery disease, heart failure or pulmonary hypertension may need to acclimate slowly, avoid strenuous activity early in the trip or adjust medications.

## SMART TIPS FOR A SMOOTH TRIP

Staying hydrated is important, especially during long flights or drives. Avoid excessive caffeine or alcohol, which can contribute to dehydration or raise one's heart rate. Wearing comfortable clothing and shoes can promote circulation.

Listen to your body and pace activities cautiously. Plan breaks, avoid overexertion and schedule rest days if your itinerary is full. Traveling companions should be aware of your condition and know what to do in case of an emergency.

Travel insurance that covers preexisting conditions can offer extra peace of mind. Some policies include access to medical hotlines, emergency services or translation support if needed.