

Gillian was diagnosed in 2009 with Paroxysmal Supraventricular Tachycardia (PSVT) Here we read her story and how she has discovered the cause of most of her palpitations.

I am practically phobic of anything medical so it hasn't been easy at all I guess - the thought of having an ablation scares the living daylight out of me - I'm hoping it never comes to that! I think I've probably had the condition since I was in college (aged 19 - I'm 45 now!), if not even earlier! I've always felt skippy beats, but fear kept me away from doctors, in fact, my dad reassured me he'd always had the odd skipped beat - not to worry!!

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My first prolonged episode was in college and I put it down to too much coffee - it lasted around 15-20 minutes and settled when I went to lie down - I didn't report it to anyone! After that I didn't have another prolonged episode, until my official diagnosis, when it kicked off while at a wedding party in November 2009, after doing ceilidh dancing! This time it stuck at 220bpm and refused to slow down. I ended up in the

local hospital and was given Adenosine (3x), released that night & referred back to my doctor. My heart kicked off again twice in March 2010. The first time I was able to stop it with the frozen peas to the chest routine, but it flipped out of rhythm the second time - into my local A&E, given Amiodarone and kept in over-night. I was referred to a cardiologist at my nearest teaching hospital. He said since the episodes were fairly infrequent and I obviously didn't "do" doctors or hospitals, I should be able to control it with diet. I don't drink alcohol anyway, so not a big deal - I don't eat much chocolate at all now (definitely no dark chocolate!) and don't drink coffee (apart from a very odd de-caf - once a month, if that!) and only drink Redbush tea on the hot drink front.

My heart has been getting more & more "skippy" over the past year or so (I had one mini episode which normalised with 2 x 40g Propranolol which I have as a Pill in the Pocket) and had one episode that required Amiodarone again, but released the same day - this was the first time I'd gone to hospital with the arrhythmia since 2010.

I had blood tests last year for something totally unrelated to my heart and discovered I was anaemic, so I'm now on iron tablets - but within a week of going on the iron tablets, my heart went quiet - all the skippy stuff just stopped! I still have the odd skippy feeling (normally time of the month so I assume it's hormone related!), but generally speaking my heart seems to be calm most of the time. I now wonder how long I've been lacking iron - I must admit I stopped eating red meat during college and lived on chicken and vegetables! I'm now eating beef and liver on a weekly basis and I'm feeling much better generally. Having read lots about anaemia online, many of my symptoms were listed under lack of iron including heart arrhythmias and palpitations!

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My biggest hurdle is fear - I'm terrified my heart is going to kick off again, so I avoid anything that might make it race - no exerting exercise for me and no more aerobics! I've been to CBT - it helped a bit, I know I think way too much but I can't turn the thinking off unfortunately - I am my own worst enemy! I can talk myself into minor panic attacks which of course resemble my arrhythmia - the CBT helped me recognise the panic symptoms for what they are.

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I was given no 'living with SVT' information from the cardiologist - when I asked what foods I should avoid he said caffeine & alcohol and that was it - I then specifically asked about chocolate, as it seemed to have been the catalyst for my 2 episodes in the March 2010, but he simply said, well it can affect some people, but it's just trial and error! I then read about keeping myself hydrated from a personal experience written about on the Arrhythmia Alliance website. I also know that getting enough sleep is very important for myself - I get skippy if I stay up too late! Feeling cold doesn't help either! Everything I have learnt has been from finding the Arrhythmia Alliance website (which again, not one doctor mentioned to me!) and doing my own research online.

Gillian, Scottish Highlands