Supraventricular Tachycardia

How it happens
Electrical signals in the heart’s upper chambers fire abnormally, which interfere with electrical signals coming from the sinoatrial (SA) node—the heart’s natural pacemaker. A series of early beats in the atria speeds up the heart rate. The rapid heartbeat does not allow enough time for the heart to fill before it contracts so blood flow to the rest of the body is compromised.

Who is likely to have SVT?
- More common in women, but may occur in either sex
- Anxious young people
- People who are physically fatigued
- People who drink large amounts of coffee (or caffeinated substances)
- People who drink alcohol heavily
- People who smoke heavily

Symptoms and Complications of SVT
Some people have no symptoms; others may feel:
- Fainting (syncope)
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Rapid heartbeat or “palpitations” or fluttering feeling in chest or bounding pulse
- Angina (chest pain), pressure or tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue/tiredness

Treatment for SVT
Many people don’t need medical therapy. Treatment is considered if episodes are prolonged or occur often. Your doctor may recommend or try:
- Cutting down on coffee or other caffeinated substances.
- Cutting down on alcohol.
- Quitting tobacco use.
• Getting more rest.
• Carotid sinus massage: gentle pressure on the neck, where the carotid artery splits into two branches. **Must be performed by a healthcare professional to minimize risk of stroke, heart or lung injury from blood clots.**
• Pressing gently on the eyeballs with eyes closed. **But this maneuver should be guided by your doctor.**
• Valsalva maneuver: holding your nostrils closed while blowing air through your nose.

Where can I get additional information?
For additional information, please seek further guidance from your primary care provider.

Sources:

University of New Mexico. (n.d.). Supraventricular tachycardia. Retrieved from https://learningcentral.health.unm.edu/learning/user/onlineaccess/CE/bac_online/svt/index.html (this is the source for the image only)