



## Dr Jithin Sajeev

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**General Cardiologist and  
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**Dr Sajeev's special interests  
include:**

- General cardiology & electrophysiology
- Cardiac devices implantation - arrhythmias and heart failure.

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# Understanding Heart Rhythm Problems and Fainting

## A Case Summary

By Dr Jithin Sajeev, Cardiologist

**A 65-year-old man recently came for a routine heart check-up. He is very active and cycles over 400 km per week without any symptoms.**

**He has a long history (over 20 years) of extra heartbeats, called premature ventricular complexes, and short episodes of fast heartbeats from the lower chambers of the heart (non-sustained ventricular tachycardia). He has also experienced fainting (syncope) and near-fainting (pre-syncope) in the past.**

### Past Heart Checks

In his 40s, he underwent multiple tests, including heart tracing (ECG), ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram), exercise tests, and electrical studies of the heart (electrophysiology studies). At that time, the only findings were extra heartbeats and brief episodes of fast heartbeats that did not cause symptoms. He was treated with medication (beta-blockers) to manage symptoms.

### Recent Findings

During his most recent check-up, his heart tracing showed changes that could indicate a condition called **arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy (ARVC)**. Additional imaging tests were done:

- **Echocardiogram:** showed an enlarged right side of the heart with reduced pumping function.
- **Cardiac MRI:** confirmed a severely enlarged right heart chamber with reduced function and areas replaced by fatty and fibrous tissue.

These findings met internationally recognized criteria for ARVC.

### About ARVC

ARVC is a condition that affects the structure of the heart's muscle cells. It is often inherited and can cause irregular heart rhythms, which may lead to fainting or, rarely, sudden heart problems. It may not always appear in family history, and symptoms can vary widely. Intensive exercise can increase the risk of heart rhythm problems in people with ARVC.



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## Recommendations for This Patient

- Reduce high-intensity exercise, such as long-distance cycling, to lower the risk of worsening heart muscle changes.
- Discuss the possibility of a **cardiac defibrillator**, a device that can help prevent serious heart rhythm problems, with a cardiologist.
- Adult children were advised to have heart evaluations and genetic testing to see if there is a familial risk.

## Key Points About Fainting and Heart Risk

Patients with fainting or high-risk features may need thorough testing. High-risk features include:

- Abnormal heart structure or function
- Fainting during exertion or when lying down
- Palpitations before fainting
- Family history of sudden heart problems
- Abnormal heart tracings or heart rhythms

Even if early tests appear normal, heart conditions can develop over time. Regular follow-up and repeat assessments using multiple tests may be needed.

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