

The HEART

The heart has 4 chambers. The upper chambers are called the left atrium and right atrium, and the lower chambers are called the left and right ventricles.

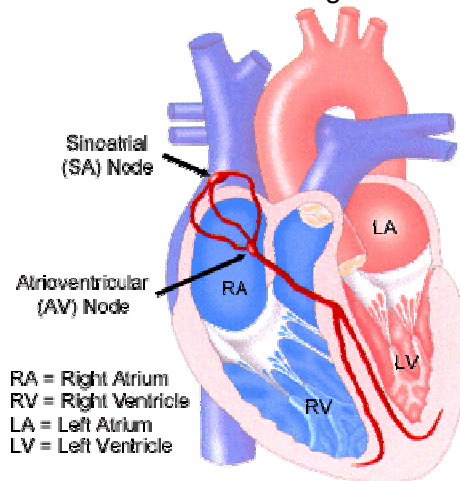
A thin wall of tissue called the septum separates the left atrium from the right atrium and a thicker muscular septum separates the left ventricle from the right ventricle.

The left ventricle is the largest and the strongest chamber in the heart.

How does the heart beat?

The heart has its own electrical system. This special electrical conduction system tells it to beat (contract) in a regular, coordinated and effective way.

The electrical impulse starts in the right atrium. The impulse spreads throughout the atriums, causing them to contract. Next, the impulse moves to the ventricles. As the impulse travels down the fibres it causes the ventricles to contract. The cycle then repeats itself. Your heart rate may change depending on physical demands, stress, or hormonal factors. At night your heart will beat slowly, and during exercise it will beat faster.



Pumping blood

The left side of the heart pumps pink blood, full of oxygen from the lungs, to the head and the rest of the body. The right side of the heart pumps the blue “de-oxygenated” blood from the body back to the lungs for a fresh supply of oxygen.

Each heartbeat pumps a third of a cup of blood around the body at rest. During exercise the heart pumps out six times as much blood. It takes only one minute for a blood cell to travel around the body and back to the heart.