

Chapter 2

Cardiovascular system

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1 Arrhythmias

Arrhythmias

Overview

Management of an arrhythmia requires precise diagnosis of the type of arrhythmia; electrocardiography and referral to a paediatric cardiologist is essential; underlying causes such as heart failure require appropriate treatment.

Bradycardia

Adrenaline/epinephrine p. 138 is useful in the treatment of symptomatic bradycardia in an infant or child.

Supraventricular tachycardia

In supraventricular tachycardia adenosine p. 80 is given by rapid intravenous injection. If adenosine is ineffective, intravenous amiodarone hydrochloride p. 79, flecainide acetate p. 78, or a beta-blocker (such as esmolol hydrochloride p. 108) can be tried; verapamil hydrochloride p. 111 can also be considered in children over 1 year. Atenolol p. 108, sotalol hydrochloride p. 81 and flecainide acetate are used for the prophylaxis of paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardias.

The use of d.c. shock and vagal stimulation also have a role in the treatment of supraventricular tachycardia.

Syndromes associated with accessory conducting pathways

Amiodarone hydrochloride, flecainide acetate, or a beta-blocker is used to prevent recurrence of supraventricular tachycardia in infants and young children with these syndromes (e.g. Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome).

Atrial flutter

In atrial flutter without structural heart defects, sinus rhythm is restored with d.c. shock or cardiac pacing; drug treatment is usually not necessary. Amiodarone hydrochloride is used in atrial flutter when structural heart defects are present or after heart surgery. Sotalol hydrochloride may also be considered.

Atrial fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation is very rare in children. To restore sinus rhythm d.c. shock is used; beta-blockers, alone or together with digoxin p. 82 may be useful for ventricular rate control.

Ectopic tachycardia

Intravenous amiodarone hydrochloride is used in conjunction with body cooling and synchronised pacing in postoperative junctional ectopic tachycardia. Oral amiodarone hydrochloride or flecainide acetate are used in congenital junctional ectopic tachycardia.

Amiodarone hydrochloride, flecainide acetate, or a beta-blocker are used in atrial ectopic tachycardia; amiodarone hydrochloride is preferred in those with poor ventricular function.

Ventricular tachycardia and ventricular fibrillation

Pulseless ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation require resuscitation, see Paediatric Advanced Life Support algorithm. Amiodarone hydrochloride is used in resuscitation for pulseless ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation unresponsive to d.c. shock; lidocaine hydrochloride p. 852 can be used as an alternative only if amiodarone hydrochloride is not available.

Amiodarone hydrochloride is also used in a haemodynamically stable child when drug treatment is required; lidocaine hydrochloride can be used as an alternative only if amiodarone hydrochloride is not available.

Torsade de pointes

Torsade de pointes is a form of ventricular tachycardia associated with long QT syndrome, which may be congenital or drug induced. Episodes may be self-limiting, but are frequently recurrent and can cause impairment or loss of consciousness. If not controlled, the arrhythmia can progress to ventricular fibrillation and sometimes death. Intravenous magnesium sulfate can be used to treat torsade de pointes (dose recommendations vary—consult local guidelines). Anti-arrhythmics can further prolong the QT interval, thus worsening the condition.

Anti-arrhythmic drugs

Anti-arrhythmic drugs can be classified clinically into those that act on supraventricular arrhythmias (e.g. verapamil hydrochloride), those that act on both supraventricular and ventricular arrhythmias (e.g. amiodarone hydrochloride), and those that act on ventricular arrhythmias (e.g. lidocaine hydrochloride).

Anti-arrhythmic drugs can also be classified according to their effects on the electrical behaviour of myocardial cells during activity (the Vaughan Williams classification) although this classification is of less clinical significance: