

Strange Heart Rate Readings

By Eric Lewis, Sr. Instructor, HeartFit

One of the most popular questions I receive is about “*strange heart rate readings*”. Here is a typical question from a heart rate monitor user:

“Saturday, near the end of the 11 mile run, my heart rate monitor would skip from 139 to 163 then drop back to 139. then skip to 177, then back to 140....it happened several times. At first, I had to be sure I wasn't having a heart attack but I am thinking it must be the batteries. What would you think? Would it be on the waist band, the foot pod, or where? Suggestions?”

Strange heart rate readings are usually a sign of a problem between the Polar WearLink transmitter and the Polar S625X heart rate monitor (commonly referred to as the watch).

If this person was new to wearing a downloadable Polar S625X heart rate monitor, I would ask her to make sure that:

1. The Polar WearLink transmitter was positioned in front of her body and that the words on the transmitter were upside down when she looked down to read them.
2. The Polar WearLink transmitter was positioned above her lowest rib.
3. The Polar WearLink transmitter was snug against her skin.
4. The Polar WearLink transmitter was tucked just under the bottom of her sports bra.

Since this person has been using a downloadable Polar S625X heart rate monitor for a couple of weeks, I can assume that she is wearing the transmitter correctly. The next areas that might cause strange heart rate readings include:

1. Did she stand at least six (6) feet away from anyone else wearing a heart rate monitor when she pressed the Red Start button to initially read her heart rate? If she was standing near another heart rate monitor user, she could have been getting interference from another transmitter.
2. Did she apply enough water on the Polar WearLink elastic strap ends? If the connectivity section on the ends of the Polar WearLink elastic straps are not very wet, they may not properly pickup the electrical signal from her skin.
3. Has the metal snaps been cleaned after each use? If the snaps have not been cleaned, then there is a good chance that there is a build up of dried sweat on both the female and male connectors. A cotton swab dipped in Isopropyl Alcohol will usually clean out both the connectors. A water wetted toothbrush should be used after each use to prevent any buildup.
4. Has the WearLink elastic strap been cleaned after each use? The WearLink elastic strap has two conductive sections on both ends of the strap. These need to be free of dried sweat in order to work properly. The strap should be rinsed in cold water after each use. The strap can also be washed on a “delicates” cycle providing the strap is in a “lingerie” bag.
5. When was the last time she changed the battery in the Polar WearLink transmitter? When the battery is weak, it can produce strange heart rate readings. To test the Polar WearLink transmitter battery strength, follow these steps:
 - a. Start the heart rate monitor, just like you would normally do before exercising.
 - b. After getting an initial heart rate reading, remove the Polar S625X from your wrist and set it down.

- c. You should be able to move at least three (3) feet away from the S625X and have it still read your heart rate. If the S625X fails to show a heart rate, then it is time to change the Polar WearLink battery.
6. When was the last time she had the Polar S625X battery changed? Typically the battery is not the problem, but if the battery is low, it may not be able to receive the Polar WearLink transmitter signal properly. Typical Polar S625X low battery symptoms include:
 - a. A blank S625X display.
 - b. In-ability to connect to the Polar IrDA device for downloading data.
 - c. When the Polar S625X is connected to the PC via a Polar IrDA device, the “battery low” indicator is displayed on the connection display box “General” tab (below the Memory Free: indicator bar).
 - d. In-ability to connect to the Polar S625X footpod. The Polar S625X will display “Check Sensor” even when the Polar S625X footpod’s light displays a blinking green LED.

If none of the steps above fix the strange heart rate reading problem, then the WearLink transmitter probably needs repaired. Send it to an authorized Polar Repair Facility. You can find one at the following URL:

http://www.polarusa.com/service_repair/serverinfo_con.asp

I recommend the service center in NY. You will also find a generic list of troubleshooting steps at the above web page.

For more information on maximizing your performance with a heart rate monitor, please visit the www.StressThenRest.com website.