

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

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What Is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation, or Afib, is a heart rhythm problem where your heart beats very fast or abnormally. Over time, this irregular beat can damage your heart muscle. Because blood can clot when it doesn't move smoothly, Afib can also lead to formation of blood clots in the heart that travel to the brain and cause stroke. Afib can come and go, or you can have it all the time. It is more common in people with heart conditions and in older people. You are at higher risk for stroke from Afib if you:

- Are older than 65 years
- Have a history of stroke or mini-stroke
- Have heart failure
- Have high blood pressure
- Have diabetes
- Have coronary artery disease or peripheral artery disease
- Have sleep apnea

What Are the Warning Signs?

Many people with Afib have no symptoms and do not know that they have it. When people have symptoms, they can include:

- A pounding, fluttering, or irregular feeling in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Weakness or feeling tired
- A sensation of not feeling right

How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor may order an electrocardiogram (ECG), which is a painless test that tracks your heartbeats. Your doctor may see Afib on an ECG



if you have it during the test. If you have symptoms that could indicate Afib but your ECG is normal, your doctor may ask you to wear a monitor that tracks your heart's activity while you go about your day.

How Is It Treated?

- Afib should be treated to reduce symptoms, prevent stroke, and prevent the heart from becoming too large and weak.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicines called blood thinners or medicines that slow the heart-beat and make it more regular.
- If medicines do not work, your doctor may recommend a procedure called "ablation," which helps to stop abnormal heart signals.
- In some cases, a pacemaker can be implanted in the chest with wires in the heart to treat a slow heart rate.

Talk to your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

Questions for My Doctor

- How long will I need to take medicines for Afib?
- What are the side effects of my medicines?
- Should I worry about other medicines I'm taking?
- Can I still do all the things I like to do?
- How can I reduce my risk for stroke?
- Can I exercise with Afib?
- When should I go to the emergency room?

For More Information



American College of Physicians

www.acponline.org/online-learning-center/cardiology

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/atrialfibrillation.html>

Heart Rhythm Society

www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Heart-Diseases-Disorders/Atrial-Fibrillation-Afib