

Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is an irregular heart rhythm. You may notice a feeling as if your heart is skipping a beat, beating too fast or hard, or fluttering. It is one of the most common types of irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia). AFib is a disorder of the heart's electrical system. When this happens, the lower chambers of the heart do not fill completely or does not pump enough blood to your lungs and body. Blood can also pool in your heart. The extra blood that pools increases your risk of developing clots that can lead to strokes and other complications. AFib sometimes occurs without any signs or symptoms. Untreated AFib can lead to serious and even life-threatening complications such as a stroke.

Symptoms

Symptoms of AFib may include:

- Palpitations, which are the feeling of thumping, flip-flopping, or racing heart beats
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Weakness
- Tiring more easily with activity
- Fainting

Stroke warning signs (F.A.S.T)

- Face drooping
- Arm weakness
- Speech difficulty
- Time to call 911

Causes

Damage to the heart and other medical problems can be possible causes of AFib. Other possible causes include:

- High blood pressure
- Heart attack
- Coronary artery disease
- Heart surgery
- Heart valve disease
- Heart defects
- Thyroid disorders
- Lung disease
- Sleep apnea
- Abnormal function of the heart's natural pacemaker (Sick sinus syndrome)

- Stress on the heart due to lung infections, surgery, pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs)
- Obesity
- Family history of atrial fibrillation
- Cancer therapy (Ibrutinib)

Diagnosis

To diagnose AFib, your doctor will review your symptoms, medical history and do a physical exam. You may have one or more of the following tests:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Holter monitor, event recorder
- Echocardiogram
- Blood tests
- Stress test
- Chest x-ray
- Cardiac monitor (Reveal LINQ™)

Treatment

There are many treatment options for AFib. The goal of treatment is to restore sinus rhythm or normal rhythm or control the heart rate and reduce the risk of stroke. Your doctor may order:

- Medicines (beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, antiarrhythmic) to help the heart rate and rhythm return to normal
- Blood thinning medicines to stop blood clots from forming
- Electrical cardioversion is an electric shock used to change your heart rhythm back to normal
- Pacemaker insertion
- Catheter ablation therapy
- Surgery

If the causes of AFib are treated, the condition may resolve and never return. In some cases, the AFib does not go away and it becomes a chronic condition. Less often, it may last for a short period of time and go away on its own. All patients with AFib should see their doctor on a regular basis.

Complications

Untreated AFib can cause other medical problems, such as:

- Stroke: The risk of stroke is much higher because blood clots can form in the heart and travel to the brain. Your risk for stroke also depends on other medical conditions and risk factors.
- Heart failure: The heart muscle can weaken over time and reduce its ability to pump blood to the body.

For more information contact:

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