

An Introduction To Atrial Fibrillation: What You Need To Know

If you've ever felt like your heart has a difficult time maintaining a regular rhythm, or you find yourself gasping for air while your heart rate increases, you may be one of the millions of Americans with Atrial Fibrillation. While many people experiencing the symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation (commonly known as "Afib" or "AF") and choose to ignore them and suffer in silence, it's important to remember that it is a serious condition that requires the services of a medical professional.

With the help of your doctor, Afib is a very treatable condition, so it's important to know the effects and risk factors associated with Afib and other heart arrhythmias. By consulting with a cardiac electrophysiologist early on, you can greatly reduce the risks of serious health complications that can arise when Afib goes untreated.

Afib: The Most Common Heart Irregularity

According to the American Heart Association, approximately 2.7 million Americans are currently living with Atrial Fibrillation. It is an exceedingly common cardiac irregularity, which makes it all the more puzzling why so many patients don't view it as a serious condition.



Afib is a condition that falls into the general category of cardiac arrhythmias or irregularities. It occurs because the heart's upper chambers fall out of sync with the lower chambers and beat irregularly. This is why many patients report feeling like their heart is skipping a beat or banging against their ribs. Every second, the heart is pumping critical blood to organs throughout the entire body, and any slowdown in this process can lead to complications such as an increased risk of stroke or blood clots.

Occurrences of Afib differ depending upon the patient. In some people, the heartbeat becomes irregular in intervals and then returns to a normal state. This is also known as Paroxysmal Fibrillation. For others, the Atrial Fibrillation may begin and remain until it is treated, typically referred to as persistent or permanent Afib. Even if your arrhythmia is episodic, it's important to seek treatment to ensure that the next occurrence doesn't lead to a more serious problem.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Afib

There are many different symptoms to watch out for, and they are usually the same whether you have Paroxysmal Fibrillation or permanent Atrial Fibrillation. It's possible for some patients with Afib to frequently have symptoms, while others experience none at all and only know that have the condition due to a cardiac exam.

One of the most common ways that people suspect they are suffering from Afib is due to frequent fatigue or shortness of breath. With Afib, the heart is

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often not able to transport enough blood to the lungs and extremities to maintain an optimal breathing process.

Some of the other typical symptoms related to Afib include:

- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Anxiety
- Fluttering Heartbeat
- Confusion
- Excessive Sweating
- Weakness

It's important to remember that this is, by no means, an exhaustive list of potential Afib symptoms, and that any irregularity in the heart needs to be treated as soon as possible. Although many of the symptoms of Afib can also occur when having a heart attack, the crucial difference is that heart attacks don't result in the palpitations often experienced during Afib. Since heart attacks are caused by arterial blockages, there usually isn't a change in the heart rhythm itself that is a hallmark of Atrial Fibrillation.

Patients with a High Risk of Developing Atrial Fibrillation

Afib can strike anyone. Even if you are young, have a healthy heart, and consistently monitor your cholesterol and saturated fat intake, it's still possible to develop a heart arrhythmia. However, Atrial Fibrillation occurs much more commonly in patients over the age of 65, and is often a result of



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pre-existing heart conditions. Patients who have experienced conditions such as high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, congenital defects, or who have undergone open-heart surgery are more likely to develop Afib.

In general, Afib more commonly occurs in men than in women. Other health factors not related to heart conditions that increase the risk of contracting Afib include family history, sleep apnea, drug and alcohol use, and obesity.

For those who suffer from periodic episodes of Atrial Fibrillation, the symptoms can be encouraged by several different stimuli, such as stress, caffeine consumption, excessive alcohol consumption, overexertion during exercise, or irregular sleep.

Additional Health Concerns Related to Afib

Many people live their lives with Afib and experience no symptoms at all or only infrequent mild discomfort related to their arrhythmia. They may be wondering why it's so important to get the condition treated by a medical professional. One of the most compelling reasons is that patients with Afib are about five times more likely to suffer a stroke than others. Strokes can be debilitating and even fatal, and are one of the most serious complications that can arise due to Atrial Fibrillation. In many cases, early diagnosis and treatment of Afib can save a life.

Strokes are often the result of blood clots blocking the path for blood to travel to the brain. Because of this, many patients who are diagnosed with

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Afib may be placed proactively on medications that thin the blood, in an effort to greatly reduce the risk of blood clots.

Early treatment of a stroke is crucial, so if you or a loved one are experiencing warning signs such as problems with vision, sudden loss of balance, difficulty speaking, or abrupt weakness, seek emergency medical attention immediately.

Managing Your Life with Afib

Living a long and healthy life with Afib is definitely possible, but you will need to be vigilant and take steps to reduce your risk for other serious complications that can result from the condition. If you have noticed any irregularity in your heart rhythm, the first step is to schedule an appointment with a cardiac electrophysiologist as soon as possible. They will perform a thorough exam to determine the extent of your arrhythmia, and outline a plan for the optimal treatment of your specific condition.

Your doctor may prescribe medications designed to help control your heartbeat, but it's important to note that these medications are not able to cure the arrhythmia itself. In more serious cases, more in-depth procedures or surgery may be required to correct the irregularity.

In a general sense, many of the treatment options for patient managing a life with Afib are identical to the suggestions for anyone wishing to keep their heart healthy. Lifestyle modifications such as eating a diet low in cholesterol and saturated fats, avoiding alcohol, combatting obesity, being a non-



smoker, and getting regular exercise can contribute significantly to reducing the risks of a serious condition brought about by Afib.

If You Have Questions or Think You May be Suffering from Atrial Fibrillation

While Afib is a common heart arrhythmia, it is still not very well understood by many outside of the medical community. The increased risk of stroke alone makes it a disease in need of greater awareness and treatment across the board.

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms typically associated with Atrial Fibrillation, or even if you just want to run a diagnostic test, consult Heart Rhythm Consultant, PA. Our cardiac electrophysiologist on staff are experts in heart arrhythmias, including Atrial Fibrillation, and can work with you to outline a treatment plan, reduce your risk of serious complications, and live a fulfilling life after a diagnosis of Afib.

Heart Rhythm Consultants is located in Sarasota, FL, and has been proudly serving the Sarasota, Tampa Bay, Venice, Sun City Center, and Port Charlotte areas since 2004. We know that a healthy heart is vital for everyone, and we strive to educate and treat our patients for heart irregularities so that they can live their healthiest life.

Call our office today to speak with a care coordinator: (941) 484-6758

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