



# Get the Facts on **Atrial Fibrillation**

The content provided here is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease, or to replace professional medical advice given by your doctor. Please talk with your doctor about any questions or concerns you may have about your condition.



## Living with atrial fibrillation

Finding out that you or a loved one has atrial fibrillation (A-tre-al fi-bri-LA-shun) may be scary and confusing. However, learning more may help you better understand what's going on. Atrial fibrillation, also known as AFib, is a common heart rhythm disorder or "arrhythmia."

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### What is arrhythmia (ah-RITH-me-ah)?

**Arrhythmia is a problem with the rhythm and/or rate of a person's heartbeat. This means a person's heart can beat too fast, too slow, or with an irregular or uneven beat.**

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### AFib can increase your risk of stroke

With AFib, the heart's upper chambers, called atria, do not pump all of their blood to the lower chambers. When this happens, blood pools in the atria and can form a blood clot. If a piece of the clot breaks off and travels to the brain, it could cause a stroke.

Although AFib can increase your risk of stroke, the good news is that this risk can be managed with a prescription medicine known as a blood thinner. This type of medicine is used to prevent blood clots from forming.



## What are the possible symptoms of AFib?

AFib happens when the upper parts of the heart contract very fast and unevenly. In people with AFib, their heart doesn't work as it should. This may or may not cause symptoms. In fact, often people with AFib have no symptoms.

### Possible symptoms include:

- Hard, fast, or fluttering heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or difficulty exercising
- Chest pain
- Dizziness or fainting
- Tiredness
- Feeling confused or unsure

## Get help immediately if you experience any warning signs of stroke

AFib can increase your risk of having a stroke. Signs of a stroke come on suddenly, and may go away after a few minutes. Even if they do, it is important to get help immediately.

**Call 9-1-1** if you suddenly experience one or more of these stroke signs or symptoms:

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg
- Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding others
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Dizziness, trouble walking, or loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause



## Keeping AFib in check

Follow your healthcare team's advice about lifestyle changes. A healthy lifestyle may help reduce AFib risk factors, help lower your risk of heart disease, and manage other conditions you may have.

### Follow or maintain



A healthy diet



A healthy weight



An active lifestyle

### Limit or avoid



Salt



Alcohol and  
caffeine



Smoking



Stress

Check with your healthcare team before making any lifestyle changes.





## Working with your healthcare team

- ☒ Tell your healthcare team if you start to have new AFib symptoms or if your symptoms get worse
- ☒ Make and keep all appointments with your healthcare team
- ☒ Tell your healthcare team all the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements. It is helpful to bring your medicines or a list of them to your visit
- ☒ Be sure to report any side effects from your medicines
- ☒ If your healthcare team asks you to have blood tests to see if your blood thinner medicine is working, be sure to get the tests



## Medicine tips

- ✓ Take your medicine as prescribed
- ✓ Place your medicine in a spot that will help you remember to take it. For example, next to your toothbrush or coffee cup
- ✓ Refill your medicine at least 7 days before you run out, to help ensure you do not miss a dose
- ✓ Read the patient guide you receive with your prescription medicine
- ✓ If you need to go to the emergency room, take all of your medicines or a list of them with you

## Ask your doctor or other members of your healthcare team:

- ✓ If you have any questions about your medicines or your condition
- ✓ Before you take any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, minerals, or herbal supplements. They can tell you if the new medicines can be taken with your current medicines
- ✓ If there are any special instructions for storing your medicines

## References

**1.** National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Atrial fibrillation. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/af/>. Accessed June 13, 2014. **2.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Stroke signs and symptoms. [http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/signs\\_symptoms.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/signs_symptoms.htm). Accessed June 13, 2014.

