Afib (Atrial Fibrillation) 
What You and Your Family Should Know
Getting Started

This guide will:

1. Provide you with information to help you and your family manage Afib.

2. Help you talk to your doctor.

3. Encourage you to ask questions.

   • Write down your questions and take them to your doctor visit.

   • Have a family member, friend or caregiver with you so that you both can hear the answers.

   • This will help you remember the answers when you get home!
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What Is Afib?

Atrial Fibrillation, or Afib, is one kind of irregular heart beat.

Afib is caused by a problem in the upper parts of the heart, called the atria. When the atria do not work right, blood pools.

This increases the chance of blood clots forming and moving to other parts of the body such as the brain.

To watch a short video on Basic Facts About Atrial Fibrillation go to www.acpfoundation.org/videos.
How Do I Know If I Have Afib?

You may have symptoms like:
• a pounding, fluttering or irregular feeling in the chest.
• shortness of breath.
• dizziness.
• weakness or feeling tired.
• a sensation of not feeling right.

You may not have any symptoms with Afib.

Afib may come and go.

Afib may be found on a routine check by the doctor.

Your doctor may order a test to see if you have Afib. This test is called an EKG.

My question: ____________________________________________________

Answer: _______________________________________________________
Increased Risks With Afib

People with Afib are at greater risk for:

- **STROKE**
  Because blood clots may form in the heart, they may travel to the brain.

- **HEART FAILURE**
  Because the heart is not pumping right this leads to fluid building up in the lungs.

- **RAPID HEART BEAT**
  Because your heart is beating faster than normal.

*My question:* ____________________________________________________________

*Answer:* ____________________________________________________________
Stroke Risk From Afib

You are at a higher risk of stroke from Afib if you:
• Have congestive heart failure.
• Have high blood pressure.
• Are over 65 years old.
• Have diabetes.
• Had a prior stroke or mini-stroke.

Talk to your doctor about your risk for stroke.

“I have high blood pressure and Afib. My doctor helped me understand why I am at a higher risk for stroke.”

My question: __________________________________________________________

Answer: __________________________________________________________________
Afib Medications

There are several different types of medications for Afib. These include:

- Medicines to prevent blood clots. These will help you reduce your risk of stroke.
- Medicines to control how fast your heart beats.
- Medicines to keep your heart beating regularly.

Talk with your doctor about what medicines are right for you and your Afib.

“Our doctor told us there may be new medications coming out soon. She keeps us up-to-date.”

My question: ________________________________________________

Answer: ____________________________________________________
Preventing Blood Clots

Your stroke risk from Afib can be reduced by taking medicines that prevent blood clots.

**BENEFIT:** Special medications keep blood clots from forming in the heart. They reduce the risk of stroke.

**RISK:** Medicines that prevent blood clots increase the risk for bleeding. Some bleeding is minor but some bleeding can be serious. It can cause you to go to the hospital.

Medicines that prevent blood clots are recommended when the benefit is greater than the risk. Talk to your doctor about your own risks.

**BLOOD TESTS**
Too little medication in your body increases your risk of stroke. Too much medication increases your risk for bleeding. Some medications require a regular blood test. This test is called a PT/INR.

**BE SMART:**
Wear a medical alert bracelet if you are on medicine to prevent blood clots. Ask your doctor or pharmacist how to get one.

To watch a short video on Medications That Help Prevent Blood Clots go to www.acpfoundation.org/videos.
Over The Counter Medicines

Your pharmacist can be an important part of your health care team. Pharmacists know all about your medicines.

Ask questions when picking up your medications. They want to help!

If you are on a medication that prevents blood clots:

- Do not use anti-inflammatories like *ibuprofen* or *naproxen*. These make your risk for bleeding go up.

- Even an aspirin can increase your bleeding risk.

- Do not use products that have *ginseng* or *ma huang* in them. Do not use medicines that have *pseudoephedrine*. **READ ALL LABELS** to avoid these ingredients.

- Ask your doctor what is safe for you to take for pain.

If you take medications to prevent blood clots, talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. They will make sure they can safely be used together. Not all medicines can be used together.
Taking Your Medicine

Take all medicines as directed on the bottle. If you don’t take all your medicines, your chance of having a stroke is greater.

• Bring all your medicines to every doctor’s visit.

• At home, put your medicines in the same, easy-to-find place. Some people like to use a pill organizer. You can get these at the drug store.

• If you miss a dose, do not double the next dose. Instead, continue taking your medicine as directed.

• Tell your doctor why you stopped taking any of your medicines.
Eating Right With Afib

Vitamin K can have an affect on some medications. Vitamin K is found in green vegetables like broccoli, lettuce and spinach. You CAN eat these foods, but it is very important to eat the same amounts every week. Talk to your doctor about changing your medications so you can eat greens and salads.

“My doctor adjusted my medicine so I can continue eating lots of salads.”

Eating a heart healthy diet is good for your heart. Stay away from fatty and salty foods when you can. Eat more fruits and vegetables.

Some of the newer medicines to prevent blood clots are not affected by what you eat.
Caffeine can cause your Afib to go out of control.

Caffeine can be found in:
- Coffee and tea
- Colas and other soft drinks
- Chocolate
- “Energy” drinks

Ask your doctor what you should drink.

Ask your doctor if it is OK for you to have alcohol.

My question: ________________________________________________

Answer: ____________________________________________________
Exercising With Afib

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Most people with Afib should exercise. Ask your doctor to make sure you can exercise. Once you get started, you may feel better.

Examples of good activities include:
- Walking
- Riding a stationary bike
- Swimming
- Yoga or stretching
- Golf

Do not overdo it. If you have trouble talking or catching your breath while exercising, slow down. You may be working too hard. Listen to your body!

My question: ________________________________

Answer: ____________________________________
A good heart rate is between 80 and 110 beats per minute. When Afib gets out of control, the rate may rise much higher.

To check your heart rate:
• Place the tip of your index and middle fingers on your opposite wrist below the base of the thumb.
• Count the number of beats you feel in 30 seconds.
• Multiply the number of beats by 2. This is your heart rate.

You can also use the readout from a blood pressure monitor.

Have your family, friend or caregiver learn how to take your heart rate.

My usual resting heart rate is __________.
Other Treatments For Afib

Some treatments for Afib can:
• Help return your heart beat to a regular rhythm.
• Reduce the risk of having Afib return.

Ask your health care professional if these procedures are right for you and your Afib.

My question: __________________________________________________________

Answer: ______________________________________________________________
Getting Help

Ask your doctor to help you fill out this page.

AFIB SYMPTOMS
Call 911 when your:
• Symptoms are _____________________________________
• Heart rate is _________________________________
• Bleeding symptoms are __________________________

Call your doctor when your:
• Symptoms are _____________________________________
• Heart rate is _________________________________
• Bleeding symptoms are __________________________

STROKE SYMPTOMS
Call 911 right away if you have:
• A drooping of the face.
• Inability to raise an arm or leg.
• Slurred speech.

You may only have three hours to get the most effective treatment if you are having a stroke.

My question: _______________________________________________________________

Answer: ________________________________________________________________
My Important Numbers

If you think you are having a stroke: **CALL 911!**

Primary Care Doctor: ____________________________
Phone # __________________

Cardiologist: _________________________________
Phone # __________________

Pharmacy: _________________________________
Phone # __________________

Other Specialist: ____________________________
Phone # __________________

Other Specialist: ____________________________
Phone # __________________

Other Specialist: ____________________________
Phone # __________________
Hospital Discharge Checklist

☐ Have a family member or friend understand all discharge instructions.

☐ Have a list of all your medicines. The list should include any medicines started during your hospital stay.

☐ Make a list of any medicines that were stopped during your hospital stay.

☐ Before you leave the hospital, schedule your follow up doctor visits and blood tests.

☐ Ask about your diet and exercise.

☐ Ask your doctor when you should call 911 or when to call the doctor.

When You Get Home

☐ Schedule any follow up doctor visits and blood tests that were not set up in the hospital.

☐ Bring all your medicines to your next doctor’s visit.
  • Include new medicines.
  • Include any medicines that were stopped during your hospital stay.

☐ Read your Afib booklet and write down questions for the doctor.

☐ Bring your Afib booklet to your next doctor’s visit.

If you have questions, SPEAK UP and ASK.

To watch a short video on Afib Hospital Discharge go to www.acpfoundation.org/videos.
NOTE THE TIME WHEN ANY SYMPTOMS FIRST APPEAR. If given within three hours of the first symptom, there is an FDA-approved clot-buster medication that may reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

LEARN ABOUT MORE SIGNS OF STROKE AT www.stroke.org/symp