

Atrial Fibrillation



What Is Atrial Fibrillation (Afib)?

Atrial fibrillation, or Afib, is when your heart is beating very fast or is not beating normally. 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. People with Afib are at higher risk for stroke, heart failure, and rapid heartbeat. You are at higher risk for stroke from Afib if you:

- Have heart failure
- Have high blood pressure
- Are over 65 years old
- Have diabetes
- Had a stroke or mini-stroke before



What Are the Warning Signs of Atrial Fibrillation?

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
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Weakness or feeling tired
- A sensation of not feeling right



How Is Atrial Fibrillation Diagnosed?

Your doctor may order an electrocardiogram (ECG). An ECG 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 be Afib but your ECG is normal, your doctor may send you for a test that tracks your heart's activity while you go about your day.



How Is Atrial Fibrillation Treated?

Many patients with Afib need to be on medicines to prevent stroke. Some people only need aspirin. Others need to take medicines called blood thinners. Treatment sometimes includes medicines to slow the heartbeat or make it more regular. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

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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 of stroke?
- Can I exercise with Afib?
- When should I go to the emergency room?



Bottom Line

- Atrial fibrillation is when your heart is beating very fast or is not beating normally. This can cause stroke.
- Some people with Afib can have no symptoms. Others can feel a pounding in their chest, shortness of breath, dizziness, and weakness.
- Your doctor may diagnose Afib after a test called an electrocardiogram (ECG), which tracks your heartbeats.
- Patients with Afib may need to be on medicines to prevent stroke. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

For More Information

- **ACP:** www.acponline.org/patients_families/products/health_tips/afib_en.pdf
- **Medline Plus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/atrialfibrillation.html
- **Heart Rhythm Society:** www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Heart-Diseases-Disorders/Atrial-Fibrillation-AFib#axzz3UrpqV85k

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