

Understanding Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)

What is AFib?

Atrial Fibrillation (AFib) is a common heart rhythm disorder where the heart's upper chambers (atria) beat irregularly, leading to poor blood flow and potential complications like stroke.

What causes AFib?

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease or valve issues
- Overactive thyroid
- Excessive alcohol or caffeine consumption
- Sleep apnea
- Family history

What are the symptoms of AFib?

- Rapid, irregular heartbeat
- Palpitations or fluttering in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Fatigue, especially during activities
- Weakness

Who is at risk for developing AFib?

- Older adults (age 60+)
- Individuals with high blood pressure, heart disease, or obesity
- Those with a history of heart attacks, heart surgery, or excessive alcohol consumption

Why is AFib a serious condition?

AFib increases your risk of:

- **Stroke:** AFib can cause blood clots to form in the heart, which can travel to the brain.
- **Heart Failure:** The irregular rhythm can weaken your heart over time.
- **Other Complications:** Blood clots and chronic fatigue can develop if AFib is untreated.

Managing and Treating AFib

Treatment Options:

Medications:

- **Blood Thinners:** Reduce the risk of blood clots and stroke.
- **Rate Control Medications:** Help slow down the heart rate.
- **Rhythm Control Medications:** Help maintain a normal heart rhythm.

Procedures:

- **Cardioversion:** A procedure to reset the heart's rhythm.
- **Catheter Ablation:** A minimally invasive procedure to disrupt faulty electrical signals.
- **Pacemaker:** May be used for some patients to regulate heartbeats.

Lifestyle Changes:

- **Healthy Diet:** Focus on heart-friendly foods, low in salt and fat.
- **Regular Exercise:** Engage in moderate activity, as approved by your doctor.
- **Quit Smoking & Limit Alcohol:** Both can trigger or worsen AFib.
- **Stress Management:** Techniques like meditation and relaxation exercises can help.

How to live well with AFib?

- **Know Your Triggers:** Caffeine, stress, or lack of sleep can cause AFib episodes.
- **Monitor Your Pulse:** Regularly check your heart rate to detect irregular beats.
- **Stay Active:** Consistent, light exercise helps keep your heart healthy.
- **Stay Informed:** Understand your condition and follow your care plan closely.

When to call your doctor?

- If your symptoms worsen or you experience chest pain, seek medical attention immediately.
- Sudden dizziness, severe shortness of breath, or fainting should also prompt immediate action.

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