

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

## What Is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation, or Afib, is when your heart beats very fast or not normally. Over time, this can damage your heart muscle. It can also cause stroke because Afib can cause blood clots to form in the heart and travel to the brain. It 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. You are at a higher risk for stroke from Afib if you:

- Are older than 65 years
- Have heart failure
- Have high blood pressure
- Have breathing difficulties when you sleep

## What Are the Warning Signs?

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
- Chest pain
- Weakness or feeling tired
- A sensation of not feeling right

## How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor may order an electrocardiogram (ECG), a painless test that tracks your heartbeat. 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 ask you to wear a monitor that tracks your heart's activity while you go about your day.

## How Is It Treated?

- Afib is treated to reduce symptoms, prevent stroke, and prevent the heart from becoming too large and thick.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicines called blood thinners, or medicines that slow the heartbeat and make it more regular.
- If medicines do not work, your doctor may recommend a procedure called "ablation." Ablation is a procedure that helps to stop abnormal heart signals.



- In some cases, a pacemaker can be implanted near your heart to keep your heartbeat regular.
- Talk to your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

## 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

- Afib is when your heart beats very fast or not normally. This can cause stroke.
- Some people with Afib have no symptoms. Others can feel a pounding or fluttering in the chest, shortness of breath, dizziness, and weakness.
- Your doctor may diagnose Afib after a test called an ECG, which tracks your heartbeat. He or she may also want to monitor your heart for a longer time to see if you have Afib.
- People with Afib may need to be on medicines to prevent stroke. In some cases, your doctor may recommend having a procedure to help you feel better. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

## For More Information



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### American College of Physicians

[www.acponline.org/patient\\_ed/cardiovascular](http://www.acponline.org/patient_ed/cardiovascular)

### Medline Plus

<https://medlineplus.gov/atrialfibrillation.html>

### Heart Rhythm Society

[www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Heart-Diseases-Disorders/Atrial-Fibrillation-Afib](http://www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Heart-Diseases-Disorders/Atrial-Fibrillation-Afib)