

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What is atrial fibrillation?

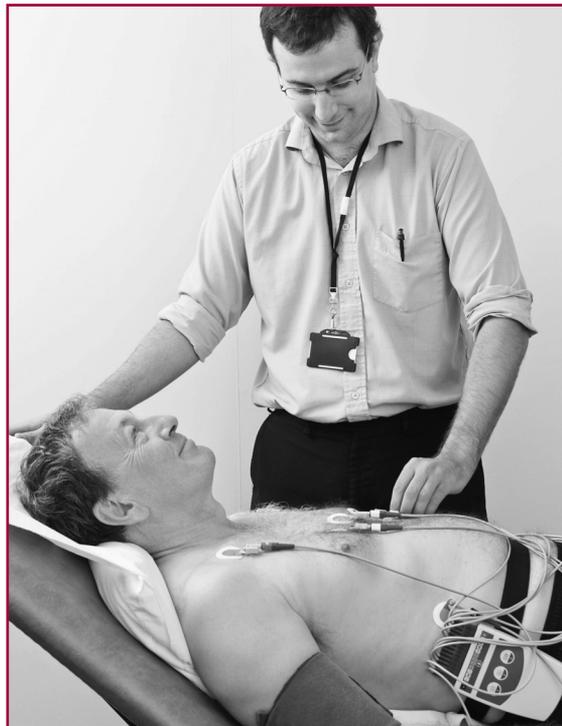
- Atrial fibrillation is an irregular and sometimes very fast heart beat. Atrial fibrillation can come and go or be constant. It is more common in people with heart conditions and in older people than in younger people .

Atrial fibrillation can lead to 3 bad health outcomes:

- Symptoms can make a person unable to do their usual activities.
- Over the long term, a very fast heartbeat can damage heart muscle.
- Atrial fibrillation can cause stroke when blood clots form in the heart and travel to the brain.

How would I know if I have atrial fibrillation?

- Many people with atrial fibrillation have no symptoms and don't know that they have it.
- When people have symptoms, they include palpitations (pounding in the chest), shortness of breath, or tiredness.
- Your doctor may see atrial fibrillation on an electrocardiogram (ECG) if an episode occurs during the test.
- If you have symptoms that could be atrial fibrillation but your ECG is normal, your doctor may send you for a test that records your heartbeat while you go about your usual activities.
- If you have atrial fibrillation, your doctor may do an echocardiogram to look for heart problems. Echocardiograms use sound waves to take pictures of the heart.



What is the treatment?

- Many patients with atrial fibrillation need to be on drugs to prevent stroke. Some people need only aspirin. Others need to take the blood thinner warfarin.
- Treatment usually includes drugs to slow the heart down or make it more regular.
- Less often, more aggressive treatment with catheters, surgery, or a pacemaker is needed.
- Atrial fibrillation treatment can have dangerous side effects. It is important to follow instructions and see your doctor regularly.

For More Information

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/atrialfibrillation/htm/_no_50_no_0.htm
MedlinePlus

www.hrspatients.org/patients/heart_disorders/atrial_fibrillation/default.asp
Heart Rhythm Society

circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/117/20/e340
American Heart Association

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