

What is AFib?



Atrial fibrillation, also called AFib, is a common heart rhythm problem. AFib can put patients at risk of having a stroke or other medical problems.

The heart has four chambers. The two upper chambers are called the atria, and the two lower chambers are called the ventricles. Normally, the heart pumps by sending electrical pulses from the atria to the ventricles. With AFib, these signals are disrupted, causing the heart to beat irregularly and often faster than usual. This makes the heart pump less efficiently.

What causes AFib?

- Heart valve disorders
- Heart failure
- Complications from heart surgery
- High blood pressure
- Alcohol or binge drinking
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Sleep apnea
- Hyperthyroidism
- Hypothyroidism
- Chronic kidney disease

What are symptoms of AFib?

AFib does not always cause symptoms, but it may lead to the following:



Palpitations (the uncomfortable feeling of your heart beating fast and/or irregularly)



Chest tightness or pain



Feeling more tired than usual



Feeling lightheaded



Difficulty breathing, especially with activity

What tests are used to check for AFib?

An ECG or cardiac rhythm monitor can be used to diagnose AFib. During an ECG, small stickers are placed on the chest, arms, and legs to check heart rhythm and heart rate. A doctor may order blood tests or an echocardiogram for additional testing. During an echocardiogram, pictures of the heart are taken to look at the structure and function of the heart.

How can I prevent AFib?

You can lower your risk of AFib and prevent future episodes by:

- Keeping your blood pressure controlled
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Exercising as directed by your doctor
- Limiting alcohol
- Avoiding tobacco and nicotine
- Treating any thyroid disease
- Treating sleep apnea if you have it



What complications can AFib cause?

Blood can clot in the heart when it does not beat in a steady rhythm. When this occurs, the blood clot can travel to different parts of the body. If the clot travels to the brain, it can cause a stroke. Blood clots can also cause problems with blood vessels and blood supply to the intestines and limbs.

How is AFib treated?



- Anticoagulant medications are used to prevent blood from clotting in the heart, which can help prevent a stroke or other complications. This is the most important part of AFib treatment.
- Other medications can be used to control a patient's heart rate or change the rhythm back to normal.
- A doctor may perform a cardioversion. This involves sending a painless electrical shock to the heart under anesthesia to reset the heart's normal rhythm.
- If AFib recurs, particularly if it does so with symptoms, an ablation may be performed. This is where a doctor uses a catheter placed through the veins of the leg and administers energy to destroy the areas in the heart causing the abnormal electrical signals.

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