

Understanding Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)

EXPERT ADVICE

Catheter Ablation

“If medications fail to treat or manage atrial fibrillation, catheter ablation may be a next step. During ablation, a tiny tube (catheter) inserted through a vein transmits radiofrequency waves to a certain area of the heart. These waves destroy a microscopic area of heart tissue – with the goal of eliminating the cause of the abnormal heart rhythm. Ablation is highly effective in treating many different types of rhythm problems and complications are rare. Today, the procedure can often be done using minimally invasive techniques.”



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Any problem with the rate or rhythm of the heartbeat—such as beating too quickly, beating too slowly, or beating with an irregular rhythm—is called an arrhythmia. The most common type of arrhythmia is atrial fibrillation (AFib), an irregular or “quivering” heartbeat that can lead to blood clots, stroke, heart failure and other heart-related complications.

AFib is caused by stray signals running through the heart’s electrical system. For some reason (for example, abnormalities or damage to the heart’s structure), the heart’s two upper chambers experience chaotic electrical signals and begin to beat irregularly. Then, instead of blood moving effectively into the heart’s two lower chambers and to the rest of the body, the amount of blood pumped becomes based on these random atrial beats.

Symptoms of AFib are usually related to the heart’s inability to pump blood effectively to the lungs and body. Common ones include weakness, shortness of breath, dizziness, and heart palpitation (the feeling of your heart “fluttering” or “skipping a beat”).

Complications and risk factors

Many people live for years with AFib with no problems at all. However, if blood can’t flow freely through the heart, it can pool in the atria, form clots, and travel out of the heart to the brain, resulting in a stroke. Without medical treatment, people with AFib are five to seven times more likely to have a stroke.

AFib can also weaken the heart muscle over time, decreasing its ability to pump efficiently. If not controlled, the condition can lead to heart failure – when your heart can’t circulate enough blood to keep you alive.

Treatments for AFib generally fall into one of two categories: preventing blood clots, or resetting the heart’s rhythm/controlling its rate. Your doctor can help determine which options are best for you, depending on how long you’ve had the condition, its underlying cause, and the severity of your symptoms. ♥



Don't let this drive come between you and great heart care.



Selwin J. Abraham, M.D.



Jennifer L. Ayers, D.O.

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