

## WHAT IS AFIB?

Atrial Fibrillation is Atrial fibrillation is an irregular and often rapid heart rate that can increase your risk of stroke, heart failure and other heart-related complications.

During atrial fibrillation, the heart's two upper chambers (the atria) beat chaotically and irregularly — out of coordination with the two lower chambers (the ventricles) of the heart. Atrial fibrillation symptoms often include heart palpitations, shortness of breath and weakness.

Episodes of atrial fibrillation can come and go, or you may develop atrial fibrillation that doesn't go away and may require treatment. Although atrial fibrillation itself usually isn't life-threatening, it is a serious medical condition that sometimes requires emergency treatment.

It may lead to complications. Atrial fibrillation can lead to blood clots forming in the heart that may circulate to other organs and lead to blocked blood flow (ischemia).

## SYMPTOMS

Some people with atrial fibrillation have no symptoms and are unaware of their condition until it's discovered during a physical examination. Those who do have atrial fibrillation symptoms may experience signs and symptoms such as:

- Palpitations, which are sensations of a racing, uncomfortable, irregular heartbeat or a flip-flopping in your chest
- Weakness
- Reduced ability to exercise
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain

## ATRIAL FIBRILLATION MAY BE:

- **Occasional.** In this case it's called paroxysmal (par-ok-SIZ-mul) atrial fibrillation. You may have symptoms that come and go, lasting for a few minutes to hours and then stopping on their own.
- **Persistent.** With this type of atrial fibrillation, your heart rhythm doesn't go back to normal on its own. If you have persistent atrial fibrillation, you'll need treatment such as an electrical shock or medications in order to restore your heart rhythm.
- **Long-standing persistent.** This type of atrial fibrillation is continuous and lasts longer than 12 months.
- **Permanent.** In this type of atrial fibrillation, the abnormal heart rhythm can't be restored. You'll have atrial fibrillation permanently, and you'll often require medications to control your heart rate

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

The atrial fibrillation treatment that is most appropriate for you will depend on how long you've had atrial fibrillation, how bothersome your symptoms are and the underlying cause of your atrial fibrillation. Generally, the treatment goals for atrial fibrillation are to:

- Reset the rhythm or control the rate
- Prevent blood clots
- Decrease the risk of strokes

The strategy you and your doctor choose depends on many factors, including whether you have other problems with your heart and if you're able to take medications that can control your heart rhythm. In some cases, you may need more invasive treatment, such as medical procedures using catheters or surgery.

In some people, a specific event or an underlying condition, such as a thyroid disorder or CAD, may trigger atrial fibrillation. Treating the condition causing atrial fibrillation may help relieve your heart rhythm problems. If your symptoms are bothersome or if this is your first episode of atrial fibrillation, your doctor may attempt to reset the rhythm.

## SURGICAL OPTIONS

If your Electrophysiologist has been unsuccessful at controlling or treating your Afib and/or if you are undergoing another heart surgery, they may refer you for surgical maze procedure. The maze procedure is conducted during an open-heart surgery. Using a scalpel, doctors create several precise incisions in the upper chambers of your heart to create a pattern of scar tissue.

Because scar tissue doesn't carry electricity, it interferes with stray electrical impulses that cause atrial fibrillation. Radiofrequency or cryotherapy also can be used to create the scars, and there are several variations of the surgical maze technique.

These procedures have a high success rate, but atrial fibrillation may recur. Some people may need catheter ablation or other treatment if atrial fibrillation recurs.

Because the surgical maze procedure requires open-heart surgery, it's generally reserved for people who don't respond to other treatments or when it can be done during other necessary heart surgery, such as coronary artery bypass surgery or heart valve repair.

During this same time your surgeon will also complete a Left Atrial Appendage Ligation or Closure. This can be done by resecting the Left Atrial Appendage, a pouch-like extension of the left atrium of your heart where blood clots form, or by placing a clip on it. The AtriClip will permanently close off your LAA at its base and prevent blood from circulating through and pooling in the appendage.

This prevents blood from circulating through and pooling in your LAA and causing clots, potentially decreasing your risk of stroke.

