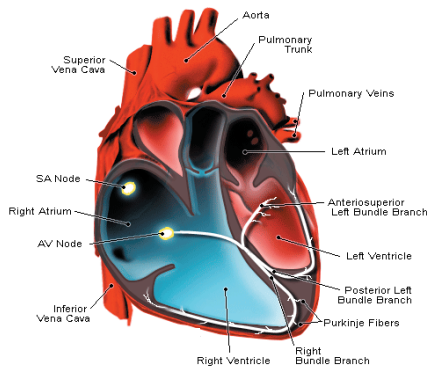


What Is

Atrial Fibrillation?



How is Atrial Fibrillation

Treated?



Atrial fibrillation is the most common type of sustained arrhythmia. It affects 2 million Americans every year. Atrial fibrillation occurs when the upper chambers of the heart (atria) beat erratically (fibrillating means quivering, or rapid beating) and out of sync with the lower chambers. In this condition, the normal system that conducts electricity in the atria malfunctions. Electrical activity increases across both atria causing them to fibrillate 300 to 600 times per minutes. The ventricles pick up only a small number of these impulses, but the ventricular rate can approach 180 or higher.

Symptoms of atrial fibrillation:

Symptoms may be relatively mild ones, such as fatigue and cough, to serious ones, such as angina and stroke. The most common symptom is palpitations. Atrial Fibrillation causes more than 70,000 strokes each year in the U.S., where 160,000 new cases of Atrial Fibrillation are diagnosed each year.

Risk factors for atrial fibrillation:

- Age. The number of people with AF doubles every 10 years of age. About 5% of the population over the age of 65 has AF.
- High blood pressure.
- Diabetes.
- Weakened heart muscle.
- Heart valve disease.
- Coronary Artery Disease (although AF can develop in patients with no underlying heart disease).

Atrial Fibrillation treatments include:

- Medications like anticoagulants, beta blockers, and calcium channel blockers.
- Procedures that may include cardioversion (shocking the heart back into a normal rhythm).
- A procedure called transesophageal echo (TEE). During a TEE, a special device is passed down the mouth into the esophagus, which is located directly behind the heart. Special sound waves are sent through this device to image the heart and its chambers. These images allow your cardiologist to assess whether or not a clot has formed in the left atrium. If no clot is seen an attempt is made to convert the heart back into sinus rhythm.
- Surgical treatment may be considered for individuals who have not responded well to medications and other treatments. Your physician may suggest a minimally-invasive catheter ablation procedure. If this is an option, your physician will discuss the procedure with you and answer any questions you may have.

