

# Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is an irregular heart rhythm. It is one of the most common heart rhythm disorders (arrhythmia). When this happens, you may notice a feeling as if your heart is skipping a beat, racing, or fluttering. AFib sometimes occurs without any signs or symptoms. A major concern with AFib is that blood clots can develop in the heart. The blood clots can cause strokes or block blood flow to other organs. AFib can also lead to heart failure. Recognizing and treating AFib early can help avoid these problems.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of AFib may include:

- Palpitations (the feeling of thumping, flip-flopping, or racing heart beats)
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Weakness
- Tiring more easily with activity
- Fainting

## Causes

Damage to the heart and other medical problems can be possible causes of AFib. Other possible causes include:

- High blood pressure
- Heart attack
- Coronary artery disease
- Heart surgery
- Heart valve disease
- Heart defects
- Thyroid disorders
- Lung disease
- Sleep apnea
- Abnormal function of the heart's natural pacemaker (sick sinus syndrome)
- Stress on the heart due to lung infections, surgery, or a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs)
- Obesity
- Family history of atrial fibrillation
- Cancer therapy (ibrutinib)

## Diagnosis

To diagnose AFib, your doctor will review your symptoms, medical history and do a physical exam. You may have one or more of the following tests:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Stress test
- Holter monitor (cardiac event recorder)
- Chest x-ray
- Echocardiogram
- Cardiac monitor (Reveal LINQ™)
- Blood tests

## Treatment

There are many treatment options for AFib. The goal of treatment is to restore normal rhythm (sinus rhythm) and reduce the risk of a stroke. Your doctor may order:

- Medicines (beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, or antiarrhythmic) to help the heart rate and rhythm return to normal
- Blood thinning medicines to stop blood clots from forming
- Electrical cardioversion (giving an electric shock to change your heart rhythm back to normal)
- Pacemaker insertion
- Catheter ablation therapy
- Surgery

If the causes of AFib are treated, the condition may resolve and never return. In some cases, the AFib does not go away and it becomes a chronic condition. It may last for a short period of time and go away on its own. All patients with AFib need to see their doctor on a regular basis.

## Complications

Untreated AFib can cause other medical problems, such as:

- Heart failure: The heart muscle can weaken over time and reduce its ability to pump blood to the body.
- Stroke: The risk of stroke is 5 times higher than people without this condition. Your risk for stroke also depends on other medical conditions and risk factors.



**Stroke warning signs (F.A.S.T) are important to remember:**

- Face drooping
- Arm weakness
- Speech difficulty
- Time to call 911

For more information contact the Cardiopulmonary Clinic.

### Cardiopulmonary Clinic

Main Building, Floor 6, near Elevator C  
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
713-792-4015