



Your AFib:

What caused it, how to treat it, and what you can do to manage it.



AFib—is it a condition you can live with?

If you've been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, also known as AFib, you may be wondering how it might have happened, what (if anything) can be done about it and how much your life is going to change.

These are all completely reasonable questions, and in this ebook we hope to answer some of them. This type of heart rhythm disorder affects millions of people across the world, so you are far from alone. That may be a small consolation, but as with any condition that affects so many, the standard of care has come a long way.

While AFib by itself is not usually life-threatening, it can increase your risk of stroke, heart failure, and other serious health problems.

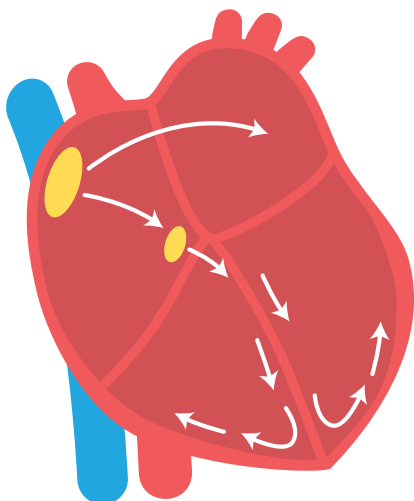
Read on, as we explore the causes, symptoms, and treatments for AFib, along with tips and strategies to help you manage the condition and maintain a healthy heart.

Understanding AFib

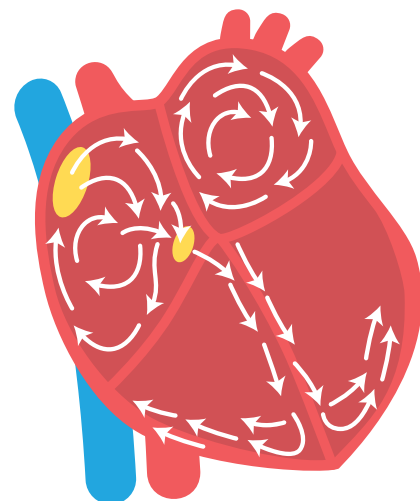
When you're in AFib, your heartbeat is out of rhythm.

Atrial fibrillation is a type of heart rhythm disorder, also known as an arrhythmia, that affects the upper chambers of the heart, called the atria. In AFib, the electrical signals that control the heartbeat become disorganized, causing the atria to quiver or contract irregularly, called fibrillation. In some cases the heartbeat is rapid, leading to a variety of noticeable symptoms, including heart palpitations, shortness of breath, weakness, fatigue, dizziness, and chest pain.

AFib can be a temporary or persistent condition, and can be life-threatening. However, if treated, it can greatly reduce the risk of other health problems, such as stroke and heart failure. Treatment options for AFib may include medications, lifestyle changes, and in some cases, procedures such as a cardioversion or ablation.



Normal heartbeat



Heartbeat in AFib

Causes + Risk Factors

What put you in AFib? It may be obvious, or not at all.

Many factors can contribute to the development of AFib, including aging, family history, and even sleep apnea. Here's a general list of risk factors that may contribute to AFib:

Age: As people get older, the risk of developing AFib increases.

High blood pressure: This is a common risk factor for AFib because high blood pressure can damage the heart and increase the risk of irregular heartbeats.

Heart disease: Heart conditions, such as coronary artery disease, valve disorders, and cardiomyopathy can increase the risk of developing AFib.

Obesity: Being overweight or obese can increase the risk of developing AFib.

Sleep apnea: People with sleep apnea have a higher risk of developing AFib due to the intermittent lack of oxygen during sleep.

Diabetes: Diabetes can damage the heart and increase the risk of AFib.

Family history: AFib may run in families, and having a family history of the condition may increase the risk of developing it.

Alcohol: Drinking too much alcohol can trigger AFib in some people.

Thyroid problems: Overactive thyroid glands can increase the risk of developing AFib.

If you're experiencing symptoms of AFib, it's important to talk to your healthcare provider to determine the underlying cause (if there is one), and develop an appropriate treatment plan.

Symptoms + Diagnosis

Can you tell you're in AFib? Not always.

AFib symptoms can vary from person to person. You may not experience any at all—or they may be quite noticeable. Here are some common symptoms:

- Heart palpitations or a racing, fluttering, or irregular heartbeat
- Shortness of breath, especially with physical activity or exertion
- Weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Chest discomfort or chest pain
- Fainting or near-fainting

Diagnosing your AFib

To diagnose AFib, a healthcare provider will typically perform a physical exam and may order various tests, including:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG), which records the heart's electrical activity and can detect irregularities in the heart's rhythm
- Holter monitor, which is a portable ECG device worn for 24-48 hours to capture heart activity over an extended period
- Event monitor, which is a portable ECG device worn for several weeks to record heart activity during specific symptoms or events
- Echocardiogram, which uses sound waves to create images of the heart and can evaluate its size, structure, and function

In some cases, additional tests may be ordered to evaluate underlying conditions that may be contributing to your AFib. Once a diagnosis is made, a healthcare provider can work with you to develop a treatment plan based on any underlying conditions, the severity of your symptoms and the risk of complications.

Treating + Managing

There are more options than ever.

The treatment and management of AFib depends on the severity of symptoms, underlying causes, and the risk of complications. Treatment options may include:

Medications: Various medications can be used to control heart rate, reduce the risk of blood clots and stroke, or help maintain a normal heart rhythm. These may include:

- **Rate/Rhythm controlling medications:** These are medications that are aimed at maintaining a normal heart rhythm, such as: beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, and antiarrhythmic medications.
- **Stroke risk reduction medications:** These are medications aimed at reducing your risk of blood clots that lead to stroke. These medications are commonly known as blood thinners otherwise known as anticoagulants.

Cardioversion: This involves using an electric shock (electrical cardioversion) or medications to restore a normal heart rhythm (chemical cardioversion).

Catheter ablation: This involves using catheters and radiofrequency (heat energy) or cryoenergy (extreme cold energy) to destroy small areas of heart tissue that are causing abnormal electrical signals.

Surgery: In some cases, surgery may be necessary to correct underlying heart problems that are contributing to AFib.

Lifestyle changes: Adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle can help manage AFib and reduce the risk of complications. This may include quitting smoking, limiting alcohol and caffeine intake, managing stress, and exercising regularly.

Management of underlying conditions: Treating underlying conditions helps decrease the risk of complications or other conditions associated with AFib.

Work closely with your healthcare provider to create a treatment plan that minimizes risks and suits your needs. Regular follow-ups and monitoring may be necessary to ensure effectiveness and to manage any potential side effects you may experience.

Living your best life

Effective steps you can take.

Living with AFib can be challenging, but there are many strategies and resources that can help you manage the condition and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

Some tips for coping with AFib include:

- Maintaining a healthy diet and exercise routine
- Managing stress through relaxation techniques, such as meditation or yoga
- Monitoring your symptoms and seeking prompt medical attention if needed
- Staying informed about the latest treatments and management strategies
- Building a strong support network of friends, family, and healthcare providers

AFib is a common heart rhythm disorder that affects millions worldwide. By understanding causes, symptoms, and treatments, you can work with your healthcare team to manage the condition and maintain a healthy heart. With the right tools and support, it is possible to live a healthy, active life with AFib.

It can be hard to find answers about AFib that apply to you—that's why talking to a ShareMD nurse is a good next step. We're here to help you understand your diagnosis, learn about treatment options and, if needed, connect you to a provider that's right for your situation. We're here when you're ready.

Give us a call: 404-620-2052