



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Atrial Fibrillation (AF)

What is AF?

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) is a type of irregular heartbeat.

If you have AF, your heart will not have a regular beat and may be abnormally fast. The heart may not empty its chambers of blood at each beat and a clot can form in blood left behind, which can then travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

What are the health risks associated with AF?

- Almost double the death rate from stroke
- Increased disability from stroke
- Longer stay in hospital
- Increased risk of a stroke happening again



Did you know?

Over 37,000 people in NI are living with AF although it is estimated that many more are living with the condition undetected, which is why you need to get checked.

**Atrial fibrillation
makes your risk
of a stroke five
times higher.**

Signs and Symptoms of AF

Sometimes people with AF have no symptoms and their condition is only detectable during a medical examination or by having a health check with Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke.

Some people may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Feeling very tired
- Feeling faint at times
- Being breathless
- Palpitations or fluttering or “thumping” in the chest

What to do if AF is detected?

If you think you have AF or it has been detected when having a health check with us you should get further tests so it is recommended that you:

Book an appointment with your GP immediately.

Your GP may carry out further medical examinations to confirm you have AF and you may be referred to the hospital for further tests too.

Living with Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation is the most common abnormal heart rhythm. But with the right treatment plan for AF, you can live a long and healthy life.

Treatment plans for AF have two aims – to reduce the risk of stroke and to manage the day to day symptoms and effects of AF.

Managing your AF

Reducing the risk of stroke

Working with your doctor to reduce stroke risk is the most important thing you can do to make sure you have a good prognosis with atrial fibrillation.

Your doctor may prescribe anti-coagulant medicines (blood thinners) to reduce the risk of blood clot formation. It is important to take anticoagulation medication exactly as prescribed to reduce your risk of stroke.

Potential treatments for the symptoms of AF:

Medication

1

Your doctor may prescribe medicines to control the rate and rhythm of your heartbeat

Cardio-version

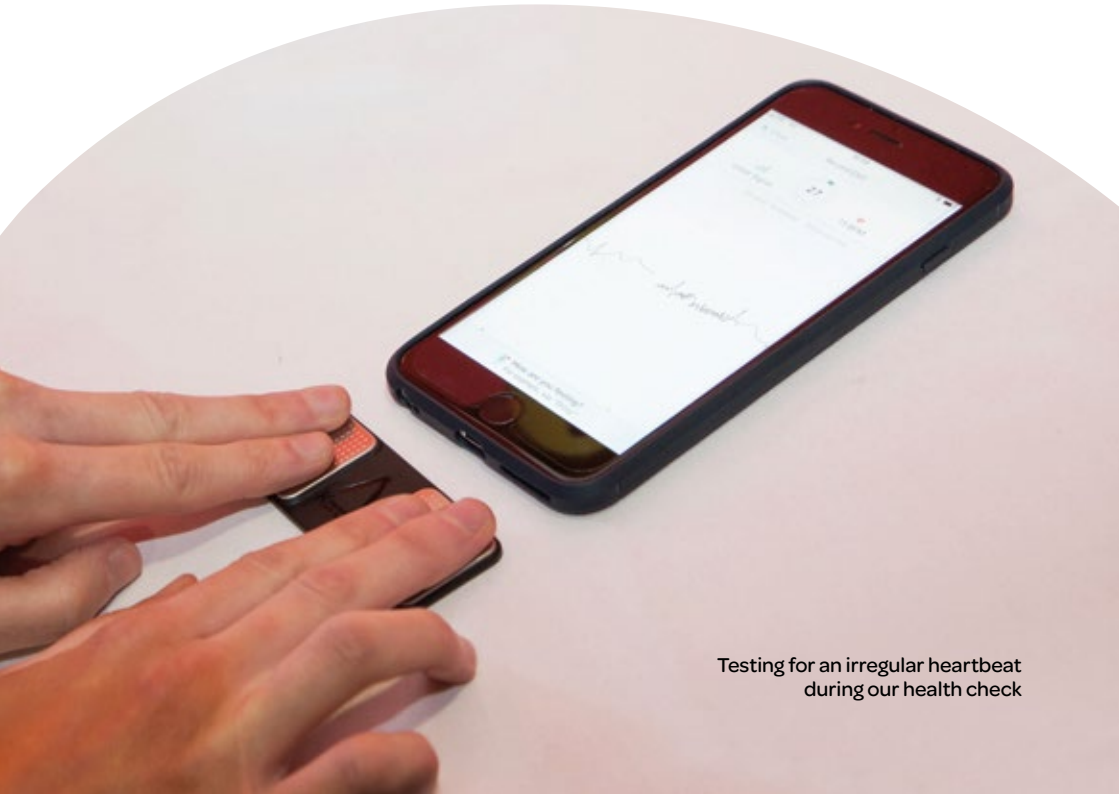
2

Electrical signals are sent to your heart through electrodes placed on the chest.

Ablation

3

The use of heat or freezing on the area of your heart that's causing the abnormal heart rhythm



Testing for an irregular heartbeat during our health check

Healthy Lifestyle & Support

Having a good quality of life is an important goal if you have AF. In addition to taking your medication, you should aim to have a healthy lifestyle which you should discuss with your doctor.



Moderate your alcohol intake



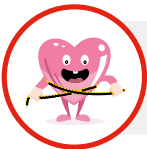
Manage your stress levels



Eat a balanced diet



Keep physically active



Watch your weight



Stop smoking



Get enough sleep

Further Support

If you would like further support in managing your AF please contact us about our 'Taking Control' Self Management Programme. Taking Control aims to give people the skills and confidence they need to better manage their long term health condition.

**If you would like more information
please contact us at:**

NICHs

21 Dublin Road

Belfast

BT2 7HB

028 9032 0184

healthpromotion@nichs.org.uk

www.nichs.org.uk/AF



**WE'RE
ON YOUR
SIDE**

Supported by

MACE



Registered with
FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR

Charity Reg No. NIC 103593 / Company No. NUI 18889 / A Charity Limited by Guarantee

Please note that the information in this booklet is not a substitute for the advice your doctors or other health care professional may give you based on their knowledge of your condition.

NICHs relies on the generosity of the people of Northern Ireland whose donations provide over 80% of the income it needs to run its care and prevention services.