

# Atrial Fibrillation

## What is Atrial Fibrillation?

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.

A normal heart rate is usually anywhere between 60 and 100 beats per minute at rest, with a steady rhythm.

Sometimes people with AF have no symptoms, others may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

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

If you think you have AF, or it has been detected when having a health check with NICHHS you should get further tests, so it is recommended that you **book an urgent appointment with your GP immediately** for further medical examinations to confirm you have AF.

## What causes AF?

Sometimes the cause of AF is unknown although it can develop with other medical conditions such as:

- Heart conditions
- Lung conditions
- Overactive Thyroid
- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure

## What are the health risks associated with AF?

**AF makes your risk of stroke five times higher.**

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

## Managing AF



Treatment plans for AF have two aims – to reduce the risk of stroke, for example through anticoagulant medication, and to manage the day-to-day symptoms and effects of AF. In addition to your treatment plan, you should aim to live a healthy lifestyle.

### Potential treatments for the symptoms of AF:

- 1 Medication**  
Your doctor may prescribe medicines to control the rate and rhythm of your heartbeat.
- 2 Cardio-version**  
Carried out in hospital, electrical currents are sent to your heart through electrodes placed on the chest.
- 3 Ablation**  
The use of heat or freezing on the area of your heart that's causing the abnormal heart rhythm.

## How can I prevent AF?

Not all cases of AF can be prevented, but to reduce your risk you can make changes to your lifestyle.

- 1. Moderate your alcohol intake** 
- 2. Eat a balanced diet** 
- 3. Keep physically active** 
- 4. Maintain a healthy weight** 
- 5. Moderate your stress levels** 
- 6. Stop smoking** 
- 7. Get enough sleep** 

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