

Atrial fibrillation

What is atrial fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation is an abnormal heart rhythm, which is known as a cardiac arrhythmia.

Common signs and symptoms

Atrial fibrillation can often result in no symptoms, which is why regular check-ups with a health professional are important. If symptoms do occur, they can present as:

- Heart palpitations
- Irregular heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Fainting or near fainting
- Chest pains
- Inability to co exercise

What causes atrial fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation occurs due to distortions of the heart's electrical messages. These electrical messages control how the heart beats. Atrial fibrillation originates in the upper chambers of your heart (the atria) and causes the atria to quiver, rather than fully contract and relax as it would during a normal heartbeat. It can also be caused by a long period of uncontrolled high blood pressure, smoking, excessive alcohol and coronary artery disease.

What happens during an atrial fibrillation event?

During a normal heartbeat, all four chambers of the heart expand and contract in sync, with both the atria and the lower chamber (ventricles) completely emptying during each beat. However, during atrial fibrillation, the atria beat rapidly and out of time with the ventricles, so blood doesn't pass through the heart smoothly.

Why does atrial fibrillation matter, and what are the risks to my health?

The most serious risk posed to you by atrial fibrillation is that it can lead to other medical issues. These include stroke, heart failure, chronic fatigue, additional heart rhythm problems, all of which can cause serious harm.

What is the treatment for atrial fibrillation?

There are a range of treatments for atrial fibrillation. Your health professional may recommend anticoagulants or blood-thinning medications, which helps with reducing the risk of a clot forming, drugs to prevent or control the rate and rhythm. In significant cases, medical procedures in order to rectify the problem.

How does atrial fibrillation lead to stroke?

When the atria doesn't completely empty due to atrial fibrillation, a blood clot can form in this chamber. Once this clot has formed, it can break away from the heart and migrate to the brain causing a stroke.

How does atrial fibrillation lead to heart failure?

When the heart isn't efficiently pumping blood throughout the body, oxygenated blood can remain in the pulmonary veins, leading to the heart. This can lead to fluid retention in the lungs, causing heart failure. The heart can then start to beat faster and faster, meaning it never properly fills up with blood to pump out to the body.



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CardioScan's
Dr Harry Mond
Medical Director

Associate Professor at
Melbourne and Monash
universities in Australia.

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