

What treatments for atrial fibrillation?

Your treatment will depend on a number of factors, including:

- how often you have symptoms and how bad they are;
- whether you already have heart disease; and,
- your risk for stroke.

In general, there are three treatment goals:

- to slow down the heart rate or get it back to a normal rhythm
- to reduce your risk of blood clots or stroke
- treat any other conditions that might be making Afib more likely or worse

Possible treatments include lifestyle changes and medications and/or medical procedures that may include:

- blood-thinning medications to prevent clots
- heart rate control medications that bring the heart rate to a normal level
- heart rhythm control medications that restore or maintain normal heart rhythm
- electrical cardioversion – this is usually done in the hospital where paddles are applied to the chest to shock the heart back into a normal rhythm
- catheter ablation – wires are inserted into veins in the leg or arm and threaded to the heart to alter abnormal areas that may be causing the abnormal heart rhythm
- surgical maze – small cuts are made in the heart, creating a “maze” that prevents the abnormal beats from controlling the heart. This is a very effective treatment, but because this requires open heart surgery, it is often used when other options have failed.

Caregivers do a lot to help keep loved ones as healthy as possible

Caregivers often:

- listen, buoy spirits and wipe tears
- become a resident expert on Afib and the related stroke risk
- pay attention to and track symptoms
- make sure medications are taken correctly--and at the right time
- ask questions, take notes and be an advocate at medical appointments
- support healthy lifestyle choices
- take a break (take a walk, watch a movie, catch up with friends)
- say 'yes' when someone offers to help (and remember, it's alright to ask for help)
- keep medical records, a medication list and other information handy

Remember that caregivers need to recharge too; there are resources available to help caregivers.

For more information about atrial fibrillation and to find support, visit:

www.womenheart.org



202.728.7199



1100 17th Street NW, Suite 500, Washington DC 20036

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Women & Atrial Fibrillation: What You Need to Know



What is Afib?



Have you ever felt your heart flutter, race or skip a beat? Most of us have at some point. But if this happens more frequently, you may have atrial fibrillation.

Atrial fibrillation (Afib) is a problem with the heart's rhythm – the way it beats. When someone is “in Afib,” the heartbeats in a rapid, chaotic way.

What are some of the signs & symptoms?



If you have Afib, you may have:

- very rapid or irregular heartbeats – some women say they feel their heart flip-flopping in their chests, skipping a beat or fluttering
- unexplained shortness of breath
- chest pain
- dizziness or feel faint

While many women have one or more of these symptoms, some say they don't experience any.

Listen to your body. Afib can occur every once and a while (called paroxysmal atrial fibrillation) or all the time (chronic atrial fibrillation). Either way, be sure to tell your health care provider about all of your symptoms.

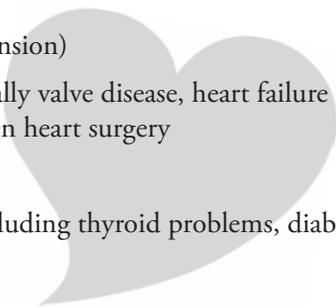
What puts me at risk for Afib?



Afib is more likely as you get older. On average, women tend to develop Afib around 75 years of age (vs 67 for men). However, younger women can also have it.

Other risk factors can include:

- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- other heart problems, especially valve disease, heart failure or a history of heart attack or open heart surgery
- being obese
- other medical conditions including thyroid problems, diabetes and sleep apnea
- family history
- alcohol



How is Afib diagnosed?

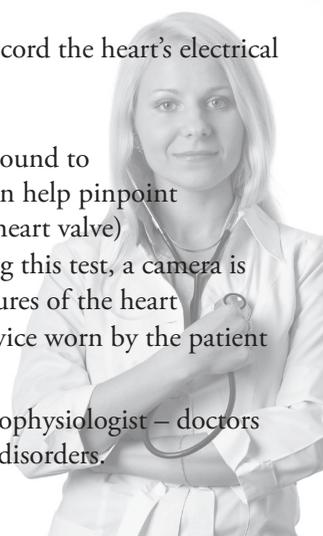


Your doctor will first ask how you have been feeling and perform a physical exam. If you've noticed chest pains, breathlessness or a racing heart, be prepared to tell him or her when they happen (laying down, climbing stairs, etc.) and how often.

Your doctor may order some routine blood work and other screening tests, such as:

- an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) to record the heart's electrical activity
- chest X-rays
- an echocardiogram – a test that uses ultrasound to see detailed pictures of the heart, which can help pinpoint the cause of Afib (for example, a diseased heart valve)
- a transesophageal echocardiogram – during this test, a camera is placed down the throat to take closer pictures of the heart
- a Holter monitor or event recorder – a device worn by the patient to record heartbeats

You may be referred to a cardiologist or electrophysiologist – doctors who specialize in the heart and heart rhythm disorders.



How do I prevent or manage episodes of Afib and related stroke risk?

There are a number of things you can do to live well with Afib and prevent problems.

1. **Pay attention to modifiable risk factors** for Afib, heart disease and stroke. Make sure your blood pressure and cholesterol levels are where they should be.
2. **Eat a healthy diet.** Fill your plate with fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats and fish. Try to limit or avoid alcohol.
3. **Exercise and keep your weight down.** You may worry about pushing yourself too hard, but moderate exercise (that is 30-60 minutes 5 or 6 times a week) can be good for you. Talk with your doctor.
4. **Know what triggers an episode.** Doing so will help you prevent or better anticipate Afib. Common triggers include alcohol, caffeine, upper respiratory infections and extreme stress.
5. **Learn how to pace yourself.** Most women living with Afib will tell you it is a livable condition – once it's being treated. Listen to your body and know when to pull back.
6. **Have a plan to stay calm.** When you feel signs of Afib, you will worry, maybe even panic. But anxiety can make episodes much worse. Work with your health team and talk with other women with Afib to get advice and tools to stay calm. Deep breathing exercises and meditation may help.
7. **Take your medications as prescribed.** Tell your doctor about all of the medications and supplements you take in addition to your medications for Afib.
8. **Know your risk of stroke.** There is a simple way to find out by using the CHA2DS2S-VASc score. Go to www.womenheart.org to learn more.
9. **Find support.** Tap into the wisdom of women living with Afib and lean on caregivers. Remember, you're not alone.

Quick Facts: What Women Need to Know

More than 2.5 million Americans live with atrial fibrillation (Afib). Even though it is more common in men, women with Afib are more likely to have a stroke. Untreated, Afib can also lead to heart failure and chronic fatigue.

