

Understanding Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation (also called AFib or AF) is a quivering or irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia) that can lead to blood clots, stroke, heart failure and other heart-related complications. At least 2.7 million Americans are living with AFib.

What happens during AFib?

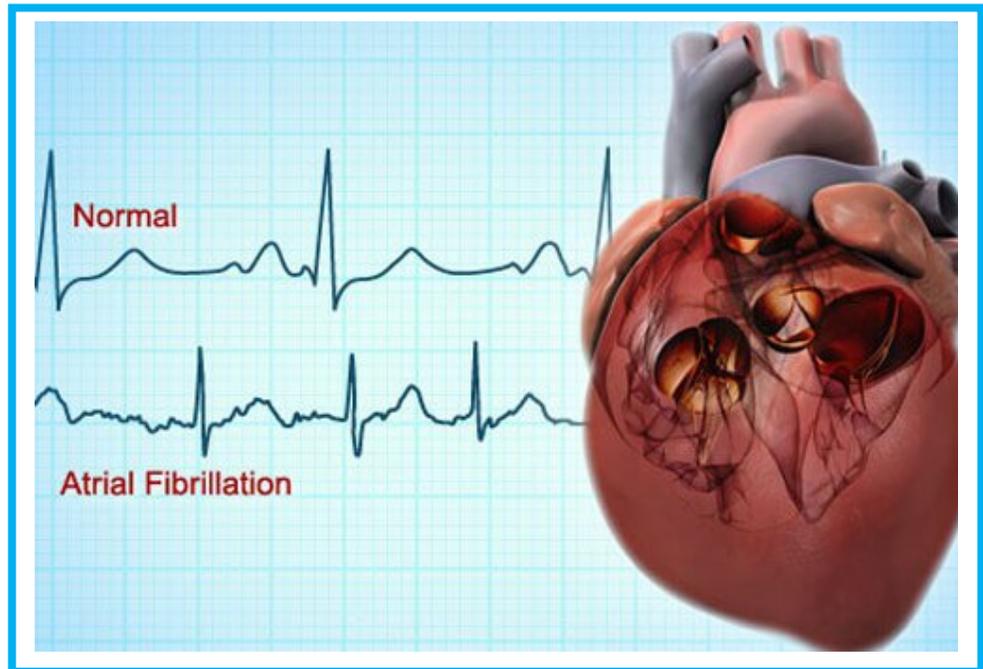
Normally, your heart contracts and relaxes to a regular beat. In atrial fibrillation, the upper chambers of the heart (the atria) beat irregularly (quiver) instead of beating effectively to move blood into the ventricles.

If a clot breaks off, enters the bloodstream and lodges in an artery leading to the brain, a stroke results. About 15–20 percent of people who have strokes have this heart arrhythmia. This clot risk is why patients with this condition are put on blood thinners.

Even though untreated atrial fibrillation doubles the risk of heart-related deaths and is associated with a 5-fold increased risk for stroke, many patients are unaware that AFib is a serious condition.

AFib Treatment Saves Lives & Lowers Risks

If you or someone you love has atrial fibrillation, learn more about what AFib is, why treatment can save lives, and what you can do to reach your goals, lower your risks and live a healthy life.



The most common symptom: a quivering or fluttering heartbeat

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is the most common type of irregular heartbeat. The abnormal firing of electrical impulses causes the atria (the top chambers in the heart) to quiver (or fibrillate).

Additional common symptoms of atrial fibrillation

Sometimes people with AFib have no symptoms and their condition is only detectable upon physical examination. Still, others may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- General fatigue
- Rapid and irregular heartbeat
- Fluttering or “thumping” in the chest
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath and anxiety

- Weakness
 - Faintness or confusion
 - Fatigue when exercising
 - Sweating
 - *Chest pain or pressure
- *Chest pain or pressure is a medical emergency. You may be having a heart attack. Call 9-1-1 immediately.**

Are there different types of AFib?

The symptoms are generally the same; however the duration of the AFib and underlying reasons for the condition help medical practitioners classify the type of AFib problems.

- **Paroxysmal fibrillation** is when the heart returns to a normal rhythm on its own, or with intervention, within 7 days of its start. People who have this type of AFib may have episodes only a few times a year or their symptoms may occur every day. These symptoms are very unpredictable and often can turn into a permanent form of atrial fibrillation.
- **Persistent AFib** is defined as an irregular rhythm that lasts for longer than 7 days. This type of atrial fibrillation will not return to normal sinus rhythm on its own and will require some form of treatment.
- **Long-standing AFib** is when the heart is consistently in an irregular rhythm that lasts longer than 12 months.
- **Permanent AFib** occurs when the condition lasts indefinitely and the patient and doctor have decided not to continue further attempts to restore normal rhythm.
- **Nonvalvular AFib** is atrial fibrillation not caused by a heart valve issue.

Over a period of time, paroxysmal fibrillation may become more frequent and longer lasting, sometimes leading to permanent or chronic AFib. All types of AFib can increase your risk of stroke. Even if you have no symptoms at all, **you are nearly 5 times more likely to have a stroke than someone who doesn't have atrial fibrillation.**

How are heart attack symptoms different from AFib symptoms?

Fluttering and palpitations are key symptoms of AFib and is the key difference, but many heart problems have similar warning signs. If you think you may be having a heart attack, DON'T DELAY. Get emergency help by calling 9-1-1 immediately. A heart attack is a blockage of blood flow to the heart, often caused by a clot or build-up of plaque lodging in the coronary artery (a blood vessel that carries blood to part of the heart muscle). A heart attack can damage or destroy part of your heart muscle. Some heart attacks are sudden and intense — where no one doubts what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help.

People living with AFib should know the symptoms of a stroke

Having atrial fibrillation can put you at an increased risk for stroke.



Cardiology
5003 Hardy Street
Hattiesburg
(601) 261-5700