

Heart Failure Program

Topics

Atrial Fibrillation



carefor you

The heart's electrical system is in control of how fast the heart beats and the rhythm of the beats.

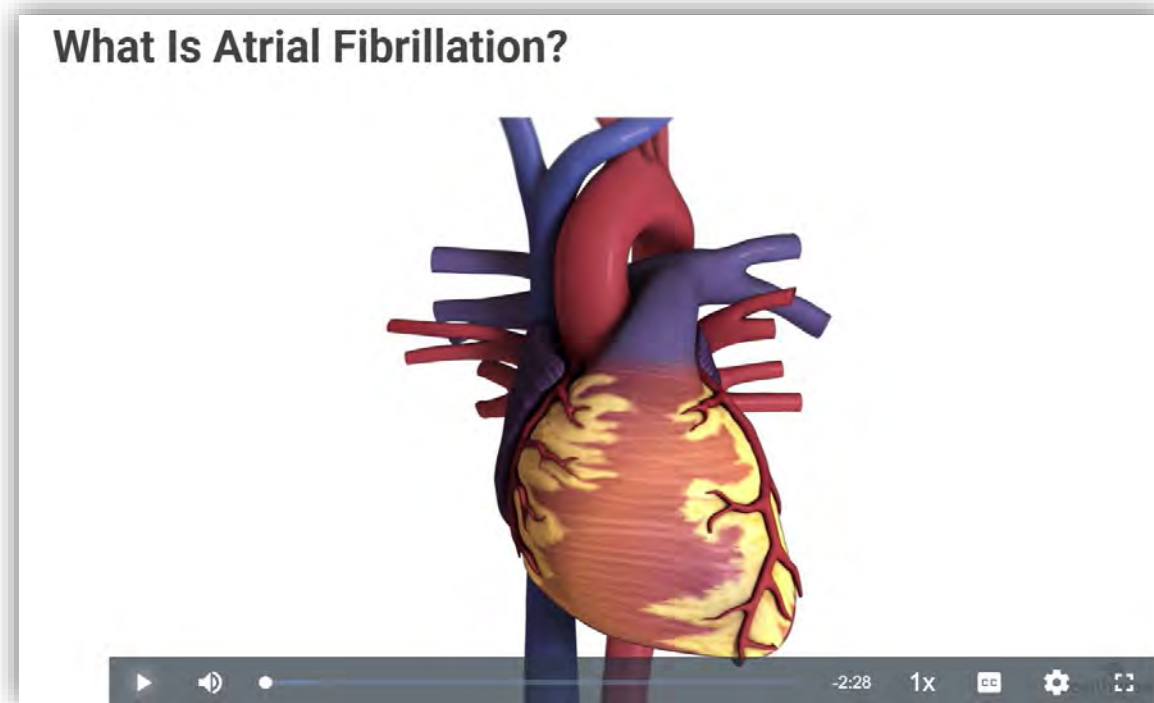
Atrial fibrillation is like bad wiring, like lights flickering. The top chambers of the heart, the atria quiver and fibrillate.

Tiny areas of the heart tissue send extra electrical signals. This disrupts the steady beat and pace your heart usually has.

This causes the blood not to be pumped properly. That can cause big problems.

What Is Atrial Fibrillation?

Click this link to watch the video [What Is Atrial Fibrillation? \(healthwise.net\)](https://www.healthwise.net)



Causes of Atrial Fibrillation

Why does the heart's electrical system misfire in the first place? It's usually because of other health problems that are making the heart work harder or causing wear and tear.



Most Common

- High Blood Pressure
- Coronary Artery Disease
- Heart Attack
- Heart Failure
- Heart Valve Disease

Other Causes

- Heart Surgery or other open-chest surgery
- Hyperthyroidism
- Lung Disease like COPD or pneumonia
- Binge Drinking

- Over 60 years old
- White & male
- Obesity
- Sleep apnea
- Family history of atrial fibrillation
- Other health problems like high blood pressure and certain cardiac problems
- Binge drinking or long-term heavy drinking
- Smoking

Risk Factors for Atrial Fibrillation

Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation

Palpitations- a fluttering, racing, or pounding feeling in your chest

Weak or Tired

Confused

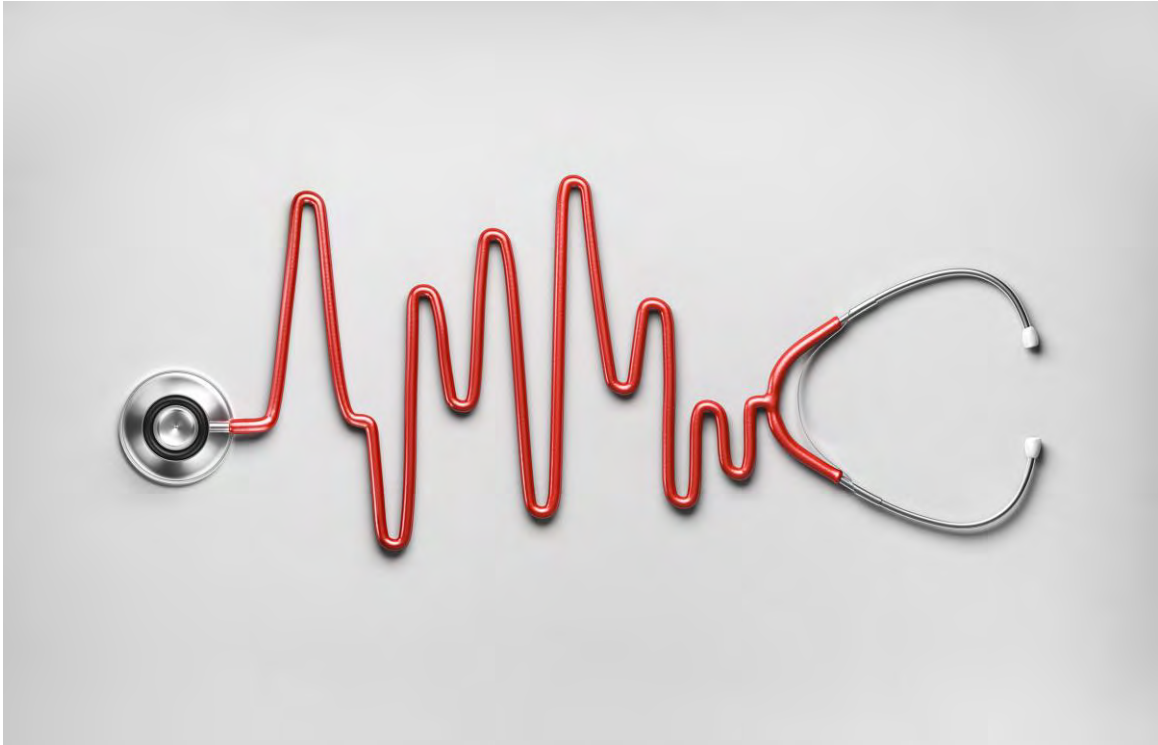
Dizzy or
Lightheaded

Short of Breath

Chest Pain

to learn more, click this link [Atrial Fibrillation \(healthwise.net\)](http://healthwise.net)

What Happens When You Have Atrial Fibrillation



- At first it may come on suddenly, be brief and go away on its own or with treatment.
- Over time, may occur more often, last longer and not go away on its own.
- During these spells you may feel symptoms like palpitations, weakness, or dizziness.
- Blood can pool in your heart which can lead to clots.
- Clots can travel to brain, block blood flow, causing a stroke.
- A fast, uncontrolled heartbeat also can lead to heart failure. Meaning your heart has a hard time doing its job.
- Treatment is important to relieve symptoms and lower risk of stroke and heart failure.

When To Call For Help

- Call **911** or other emergency services immediately if you:
- Have symptoms of a heart attack, such as chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, and nausea.
- Have symptoms of a stroke, such as sudden vision changes; trouble speaking; or numbness, tingling, weakness, or loss of movement in your face or an arm or a leg.
- Feel faint and have an irregular heartbeat.
- If you see someone pass out.

If you take a blood thinner

If you take blood-thinning medicine, watch for signs of bleeding.

Call **911** or other emergency services immediately if you:

- Have a sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches. (It may be a sign of bleeding in the brain.)

Call your doctor now if you have any unusual bleeding, such as:

- Nosebleeds.
- Vaginal bleeding that is different (heavier, more frequent, at a different time of the month) than what you are used to.
- Bloody or black stools, or rectal bleeding.
- Bloody or pink urine.

Call your doctor if you have:

- An irregular heart rate.
- Heart palpitations.
- Periods of unexplained lightheadedness, dizziness, or confusion.
- An episode of fainting or you come close to fainting for no apparent reason.
- Shortness of breath that gets worse with exercise.

Exams & Tests

- **To see if you have atrial fibrillation, you will have an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG). An EKG is a test that checks for problems with the heart's electrical activity.**

- **Physical exam**

OTHER TESTS

- **Ambulatory electrocardiogram**

- For this test, you wear a device that records the electrical activity of your heart while you do your usual activities. You may have this test if your doctor suspects that you have atrial fibrillation that comes and goes. This test is referred to by several names, including Holter monitoring and cardiac event monitoring.

- **Electrophysiology (EP) study**

- This test can help your doctor see if there is a problem with your heartbeat (heart rhythm) and find out how to fix it.

- **Exercise electrocardiogram**

- Also called a stress test, this test will help your doctor see if you have coronary artery disease.

- **Echocardiogram**

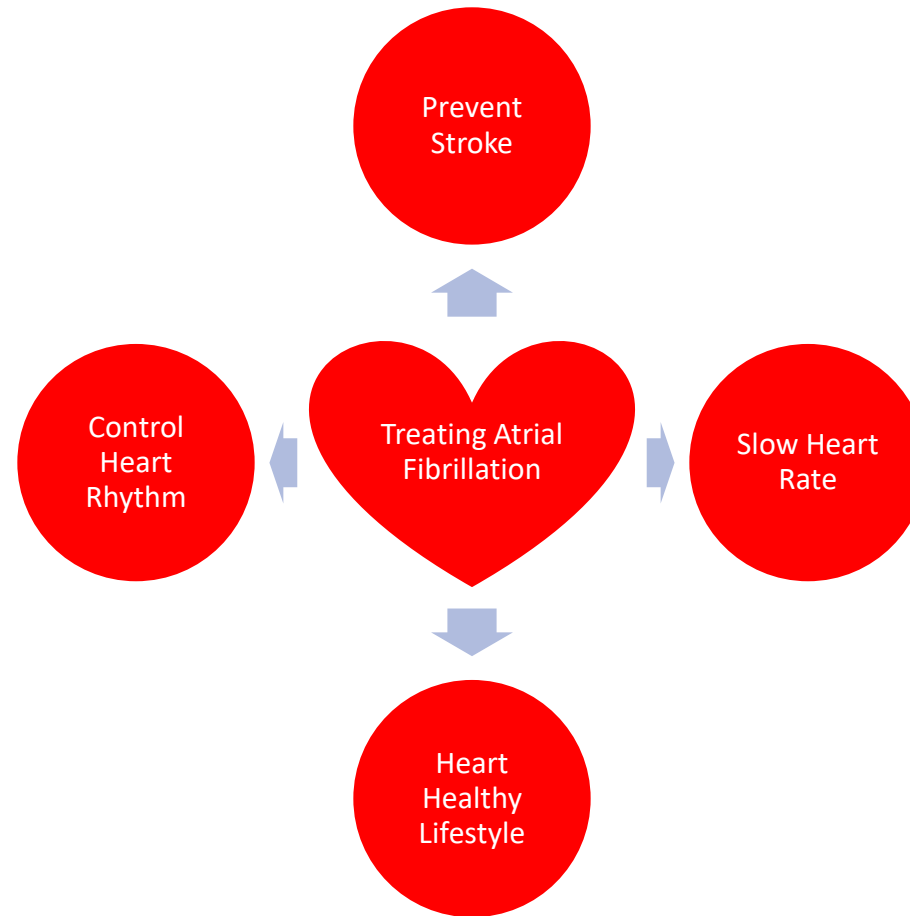
- This test can show if your heart valves are damaged, how well your heart is pumping, and if you have heart failure or have had a heart attack.

- **Blood test**

- You may have a blood test to check for hyperthyroidism.

Treatment Options

your treatment will depend on symptoms, cause and stroke risk



Atrial fibrillation caused by treatable conditions like hyperthyroidism, often goes away when that condition is treated.

Treatments

Slow Heart Rate

- Rate-control medication are used if heart rate is too fast.
- They don't usually return heart to a normal rhythm.
- Can keep your heart from beating at a dangerously fast rate.
- These medications may also relieve symptoms caused by fast heart rate, but not other symptoms caused by atrial fibrillation.
- Examples include beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, digoxin.

Prevent Stroke

- Blood thinners (anticoagulants) help prevent a clot that can lead to a stroke.
- If you are average to high risk of stroke you may be put on an anticoagulant.
- If you are low risk or can't tolerate you may choose not to take.
- A device may be implanted that prevents clots from moving. An example is a Watchman device.

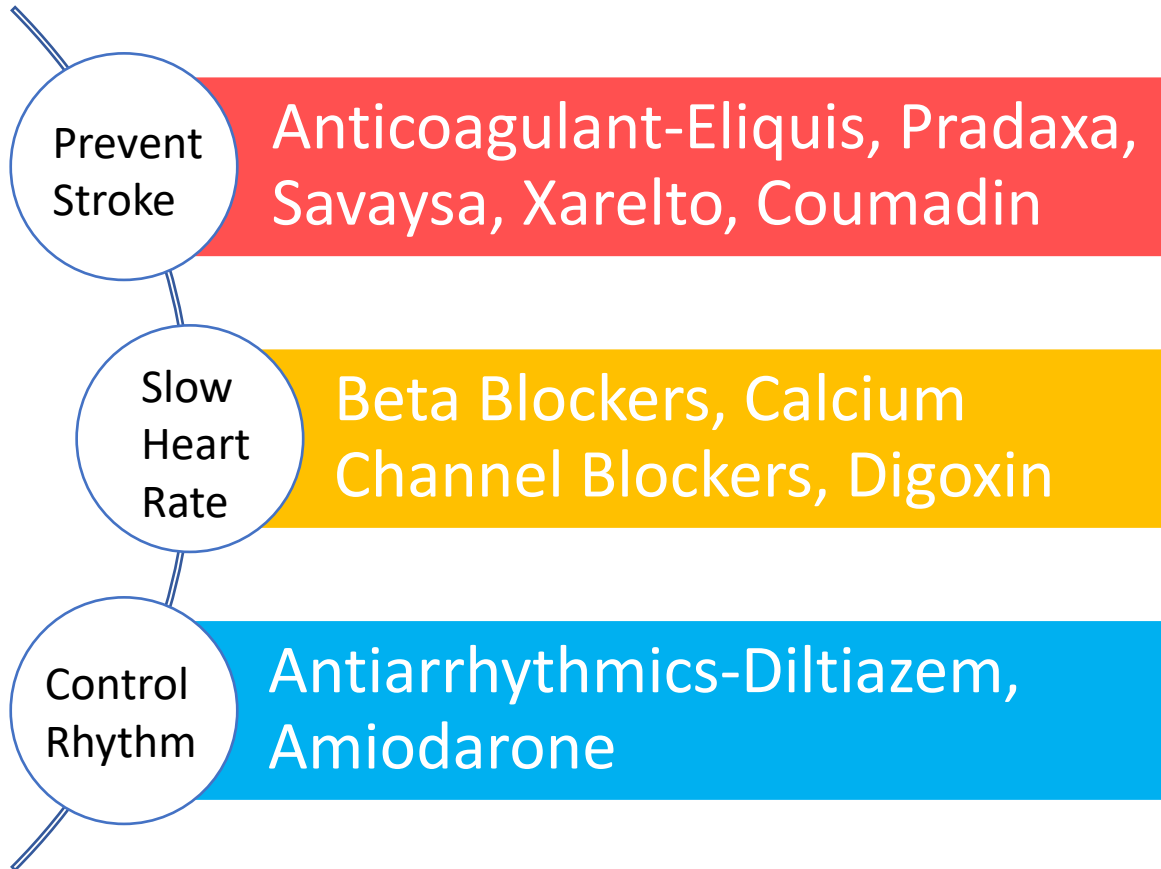
Control Rhythm

- Rhythm-control medicines called antiarrhythmics
- **Electrical cardioversion** uses a low-voltage shock to return heart to normal rhythm.
- **Catheter ablation** destroys tiny areas in the heart that cause atrial fibrillation.
- **AV node ablation** is another ablation that relieves symptoms, but does not stop fibrillation.
- **Maze procedure** creates scar tissue that blocks excess electrical impulses.

Lifestyle

- Heart healthy lifestyle changes
- Help reduce how often you have episodes.
- Includes diet, exercise, not smoking.
- If you are overweight, losing weight can help relieve symptoms.

Medicines



To learn more about topics discussed in this presentation, click the links below.

- [Atrial Fibrillation: Feeling More in Control](#)
- [Atrial Fibrillation: Living Well](#)
- [Atrial Fibrillation and Daily Life](#)
- [Atrial Fibrillation: Managing Your Symptoms](#)
- [Catheter Ablation for Atrial Fibrillation](#)
- [Electrical Cardioversion for Atrial Fibrillation](#)
- [Atrial Fibrillation: Should I Take an Anticoagulant to Prevent Stroke?](#)
- [Blood Thinners Other Than Warfarin: Taking Them Safely \(healthwise.net\)](#)
- [Warfarin: Taking Your Medicine Safely \(healthwise.net\)](#)
- [Beta-Blockers \(healthwise.net\)](#)

In this presentation you learned:

✓What atrial fibrillation is.

✓Causes & risk factors.

✓What happens when you have atrial fibrillation and when to call for help.

✓How atrial fibrillation is treated.

✓Your Heart Failure Program RN is available to help you .

We're Here For You

- To discuss any of the information contained in this presentation, contact your Care For You Heart Failure Program Nurse
- Thank you for letting us be a part of your Healthcare Team.

