



All About Atrial Fibrillation

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What is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation (AF or AFib) is the most common heart rhythm disorder. It reduces the heart's efficiency and causes poor blood flow to the rest of the body.

Although atrial fibrillation is not generally life-threatening on its own, it is associated with several serious health conditions, including blood clots and stroke. **Your risk for AFib increases with age**, and can lead to complications depending on your health status.

What Are the Symptoms of AFib?

Some patients may have atrial fibrillation without experiencing any symptoms. **The most common symptom is heart palpitations** — in particular, a rapid or irregular heart rate. A normal heart rate is between 60-100 beats a minute. The heart in AFib may range between 100-175 beats a minute in an irregular rhythm. Other symptoms may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Chest discomfort
- Lack of energy; fatigue

AFib episodes can come and go occasionally (lasting a few minutes to hours, then stopping), or can be chronic for some patients. Physicians use a variety of tests to diagnose AFib, such as an electrocardiogram or a heartbeat monitor.

How Do You Treat AFib?

Treatment options vary depending on how long a patient has had AFib, how bothersome their symptoms are, and the underlying cause (if it can be determined). The goal of treatment is to prevent blood clots and reset the heart's normal rhythm. Initially, medications can be used to

treat AFib. Patients with chronic AFib may qualify for a new, minimally invasive surgical procedure known as robotic-assisted AFib ablation. This new technique is a revolutionary approach to treating AFib, with shorter recovery times and greater success rates than previous surgical procedures.

What You Should Know:

The most serious risk from atrial fibrillation is that it can increase your likelihood of developing other health problems, such as stroke, heart failure, and chronic fatigue.

A person who develops AFib is **five times more likely to suffer a stroke in their lifetime** compared to a person who never has it!

How Can You Reduce Your AFib Risk?

- Maintain a heart healthy lifestyle through regular exercise and a balanced diet.
- Keep your blood pressure within the recommended range: under 120/80 mmHG.
- Quit smoking and limit your alcohol intake.
- Know your family's medical history and keep your physician informed. A family history of heart disease and AFib increases your risk.

Talk to your cardiologist to see if you may be a good candidate for a robotic-assisted AFib ablation procedure.

Jeffrey D. Lee MD is a cardiothoracic surgeon with MemorialCare Medical Group and Medical Director of Robotics and Minimally Invasive Cardiac Surgery at Saddleback Memorial. He has performed more than 2,000 open heart surgeries. **He welcomes new patients.**