

# Atrial Fibrillation:

What Should You Know?

“

I was exhausted doing simple tasks because of my AFib. I couldn't walk from the store to my car in the parking lot. Then, I had a MAZE procedure. It was a very positive experience. I feel great now!

”

Clarissa Alaimo  
Atrial Fibrillation & Heart Valve Patient



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An ECG (heart rate) line is visible in the top left corner, showing a regular rhythm. To the right, a detailed anatomical illustration of a human heart is shown in cross-section, highlighting the internal chambers (atria and ventricles) and the valves. The heart is colored in shades of red and blue, with white structures representing the valves and chordae tendineae.

# What Is Atrial Fibrillation?

**Atrial Fibrillation** (also called AFib) is an irregular heart beat that impacts millions of people in the United States, according to the American Heart Association<sup>1</sup>.

Normally, the heart contracts and then relaxes in a regular rhythm. For patients with AFib, the heart beats abnormally which may cause symptoms. At times, patients with AFib may experience no symptoms.

There are 4 main categories of atrial fibrillation:

- **Paroxysmal AFib** consists of short episodes of arrhythmia which often spontaneously return to a regular rhythm.
- **Persistent AFib** is when the arrhythmia requires treatment, such as a cardioversion or medication, to return to a normal rhythm.
- **Long-Standing Persistent AFib** is continuous AFib of more than one year duration.
- **Permanent AFib** is when intervention fails or it returns the heart to a regular rhythm for only a brief time.

“

I've run 38 Boston marathons. My health is everything to me. So, I was shocked when I was diagnosed with AFib. Knowledge is power. So, I got educated, found a leading cardiac center and had a successful AFib procedure!

”

Mark Buciak  
Atrial Fibrillation & Heart Valve Patient

# What Are AFib Symptoms?

Although patients with AFib can be asymptomatic (without symptoms), patients may experience one or more symptoms. According to the Mayo Clinic, the main symptoms associated with AFib are<sup>2</sup>:

- Palpitations
- Weakness
- Reduced ability to exercise
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Shortness of breath





# STROKE RISK

## What Are The Risks For AFib Patients?

According to the Cleveland Clinic, some people live for years with AFib without any health problems<sup>3</sup>. However, AFib can lead to health issues and risks, including:

- **Stroke:** Because the atria are beating rapidly and irregularly, blood does not flow through them as quickly. This makes the blood collect in the atria and is more likely to clot. If a clot is pumped out of the heart, it can travel to the brain, resulting in a stroke. People with atrial fibrillation are 5 times more likely to have a stroke than the general population.
- **Heart Failure:** AFib can decrease the heart's pumping ability. The rhythm irregularity can make the heart work less efficiently. In addition, AFib that occurs over a long period of time can significantly weaken the heart and lead to heart failure.



# Who Gets AFib?

The key risk factors for people with AFib are:

- **Age:** A person's risk increases with age. Almost 2 out of 10 Americans over the age of 70 have been diagnosed with AFib.
- **Heart disease:** People with other types of heart disease are at greater risk for developing atrial fibrillation.
- **High blood pressure:** Uncontrolled high blood pressure can increase a person's risk for developing atrial fibrillation.
- **Obesity and diabetes:** Because obesity and diabetes increase the risk of heart problems, they may also increase the risk of AFib.

# How Is AFib Diagnosed?

To diagnose AFib, your doctor may review your symptoms and medical history, and conduct a physical examination.

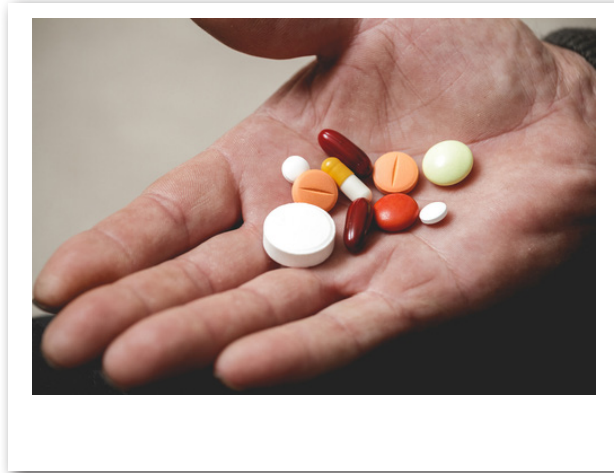
Your doctor may order several tests to diagnose your condition, including:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Holter monitor
- Event recorder
- Echocardiogram
- Blood test
- Chest X-ray
- CT scan

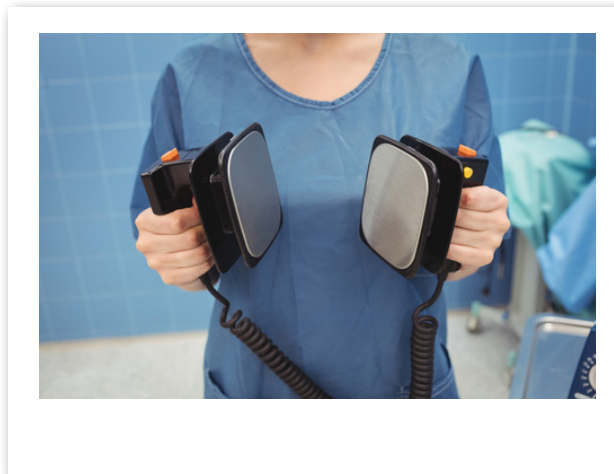


# How Is AFib Treated?

The severity, any other underlying medical issues you might have, and the length of the atrial fibrillation condition will determine the best treatment options for you. Options may include:



**Medications.** Medications are often prescribed to prevent and treat blood clots which can lead to a stroke. Additional drugs may be prescribed to control the heart rate and rhythm in the AFib patients.



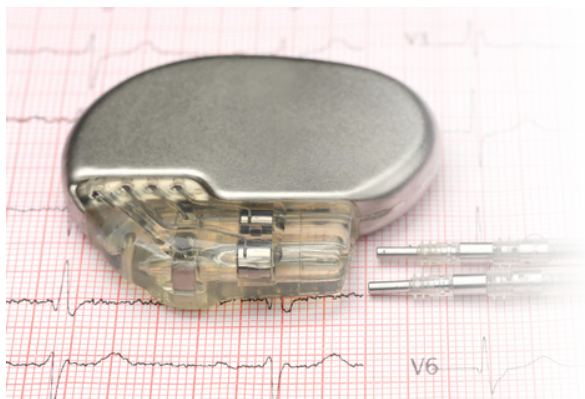
**Electrical cardioversion.** An electrical cardioversion is a procedure in which a patient receives an electrical shock on the outside of the chest (while under mild anesthesia) using either paddles or patches. The shock can be used to “reset” the heart to a normal rhythm.



# How Is AFib Treated?

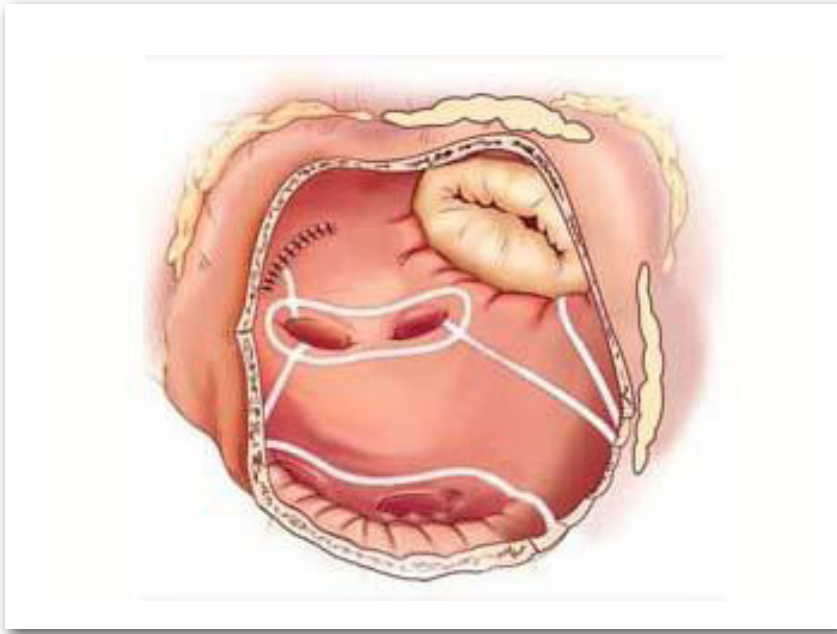


**Catheter Ablation.** An ablation is used for cardiac arrhythmias when medications or electrical cardioversion are not preferred or not effective.

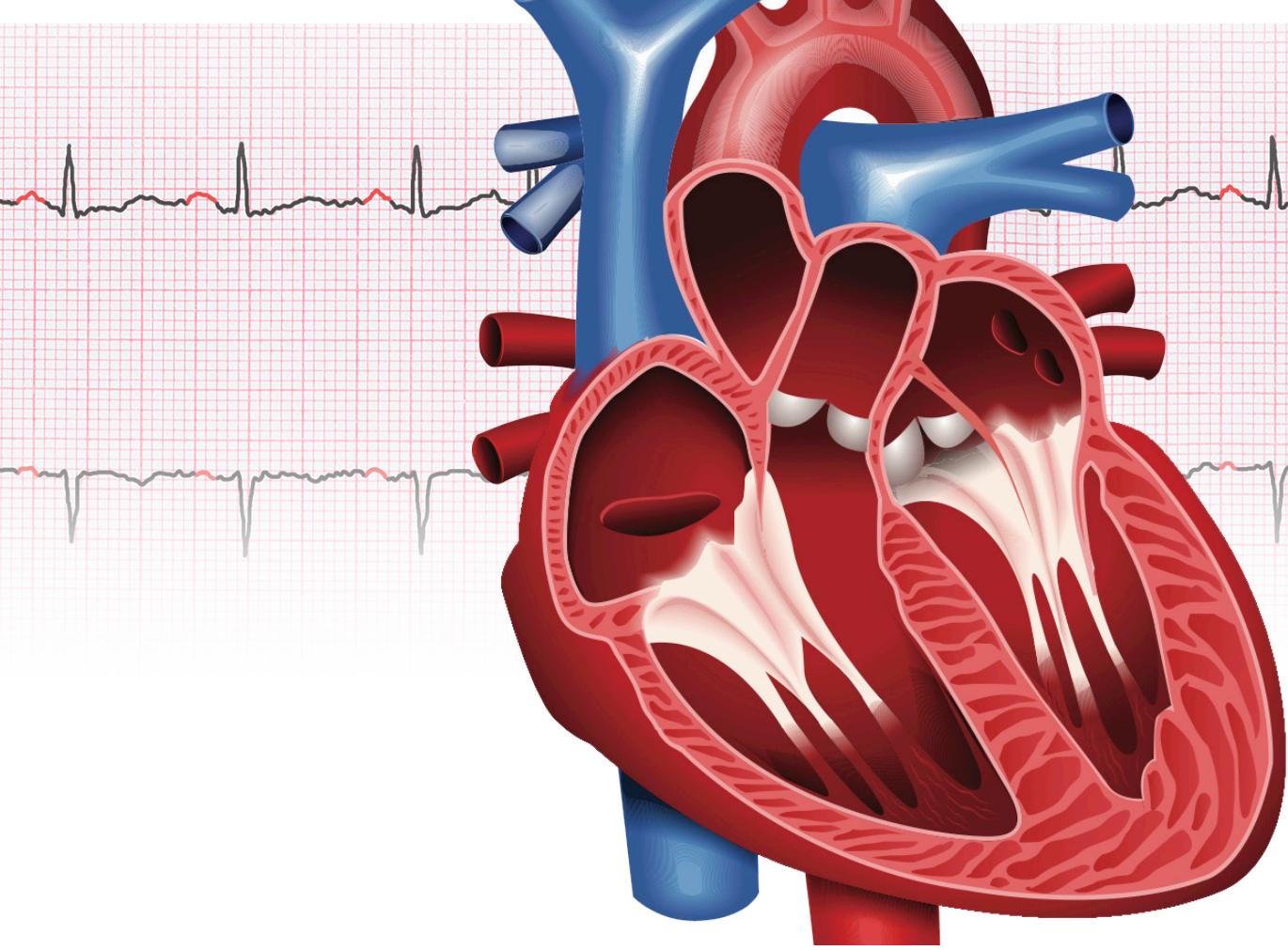


**Pacemaker.** A pacemaker is a small electrical device implanted in the body with wires going to the heart to regulate the heartbeat. It is implanted under the skin near the collarbone and sends out an electrical signal to keep a steady contracting rhythm in the heart.

# How Is AFib Treated?



**Surgical Ablation (MAZE Procedure).** Patients who have complex cases of atrial fibrillation may be candidates for a surgical ablation. During a MAZE procedure, a surgeon uses small incisions, radiofrequency, freezing, and/or energy to create scar tissue which blocks the electrical signals that cause AFib.



# References

1. American Heart Association - [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Arrhythmia/AboutArrhythmia/What-is-Atrial-Fibrillation-AFib-or-AF\\_UCM\\_423748\\_Article.jsp#.VmccPdBxOTA](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Arrhythmia/AboutArrhythmia/What-is-Atrial-Fibrillation-AFib-or-AF_UCM_423748_Article.jsp#.VmccPdBxOTA)
2. Mayo Clinic - <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/atrial-fibrillation/symptoms-causes/dxc-20164936>
3. Cleveland Clinic - <http://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/heart/disorders/arrhythmia/atrial-fibrillation-afib>