

Atrial Fibrillation: Irregular heartbeats can be managed effectively

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is an irregular and often rapid heart rate that can be managed effectively when diagnosed promptly.

During atrial fibrillation, the heart's two upper chambers (the atria) beat chaotically and irregularly—out of coordination with the two lower chambers (the ventricles) of the heart. While AFib itself is not life-threatening, it is a serious medical condition that can lead to other more dangerous problems, such as strokes or heart failure.¹

One of the most serious concerns with AFib is the potential to develop blood clots within the upper chambers of the heart. These blood clots in the heart may circulate to other organs and lead to blocked blood flow (ischemia).

Treatments for atrial fibrillation may include medications and other clinical interventions to try to alter the heart's electrical system, which controls the pace and regularity of heartbeats.

Age is a key risk factor for developing this disorder. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 9% of people over the age of 65 have AFib in the U.S., but only 2% under 65 years of age have it.² Overall, the estimated global number of people with AFib in 2010 was 33.5 million, according to a 2013 study, or about 0.5% of the world's population.³

"It is very much an age-related disease, with its prevalence doubling with each decade above the age of 55, reaching 9%, and possibly higher, for those 80 years and above," according to J. Anthony Gomes, MD, a New York City cardiologist and one of the medical experts on the Best Doctors staff.

The most common signs and symptoms of AFib include:

- Palpitations (sensations of a racing, uncomfortable, irregular heartbeat or a flip-flopping in your chest)
- Weakness
- Reduced ability to exercise
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain

Any medical condition that puts a strain on the heart can lead to atrial fibrillation. In addition to a person's age, other common risk factors for AFib include hypertension, pulmonary embolisms, and heart disease, as well as obesity, diabetes, and sleep apnea.

Your doctor can help you determine if you have AFib and provide guidance on your individual risks, concerns, and treatment options. And your Best Doctors benefit can give you the peace of mind that comes from an expert second opinion on your case. With a thorough, easy-to-understand report, our medical experts can help you navigate the road to wellness, including the inevitable bumps in that road.

¹<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/atrial-fibrillation/symptoms-causes/syc-20350624>

²<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323621.php>

³<https://www.healthline.com/health/living-with-atrial-fibrillation/facts-statistics-infographic#2>

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