

# Emergency Department Discharge Toolkit For Patients with Atrial Fibrillation



## Stroke Risk for Patients with Atrial Fibrillation: For Patients

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# Stroke Risk for Patients with Atrial Fibrillation

## Fast Facts for Patients

### What is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial Fibrillation (AFib) is an irregular heartbeat. It causes the heart to beat rapidly in an uncontrolled manner. This can cause unwanted blood to remain in the heart after each contraction.

### Managing your condition

Talk with your doctor about your condition and what treatment options are right for you. Medications, such as blood thinners, are often prescribed to prevent and treat blood clots. Heart rhythm can be difficult to control.

#### Medication examples:

- Aspirin
- Warfarin
- Dabigatran
- Rivaroxaban

The longer you have untreated AFib, the less likely it is that normal rhythm can be reestablished. Additional medications may be prescribed to control heart rate and rhythm.

Blood thinners and heart rhythm medications may also be used in conjunction with other treatments such as: *electrical cardioversion, ablation, and pacemakers.*

Your doctor will help you choose the best option for you.



**In addition to treatment, there are some things you can do yourself to improve your AFib.**

- Increase Physical Activity
- Maintain a Healthy Weight
- Control High Blood Pressure
- Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet
- Quit Smoking





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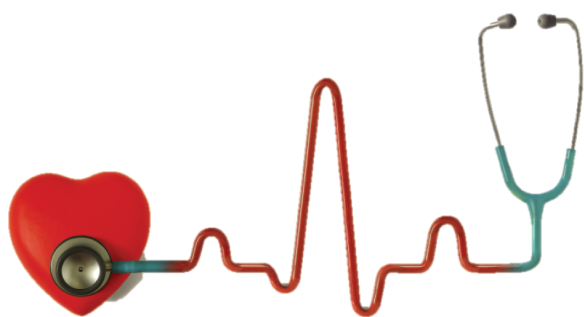
### Symptoms of AFib<sup>1</sup>

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\*

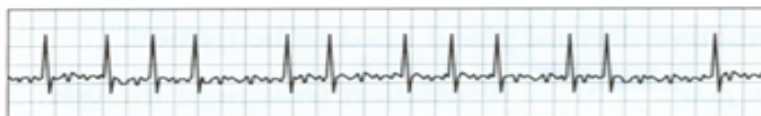
*\*Chest pain or pressure is a medical emergency. You may be having a heart attack. Call 9-1-1 immediately.*

## What is a Stroke?

A stroke is caused when your brain does not get enough oxygen. A stroke is the sudden death of brain tissue. Strokes happen when an artery that carries blood and oxygen to the brain becomes blocked. When the brain does not get enough blood and oxygen it can become damaged.



ECG tracing of a normal heart rhythm



In atrial fibrillation, the tracing shows tiny, irregular “fibrillation” waves between heartbeats. The rhythm is irregular and erratic.

Figure 1

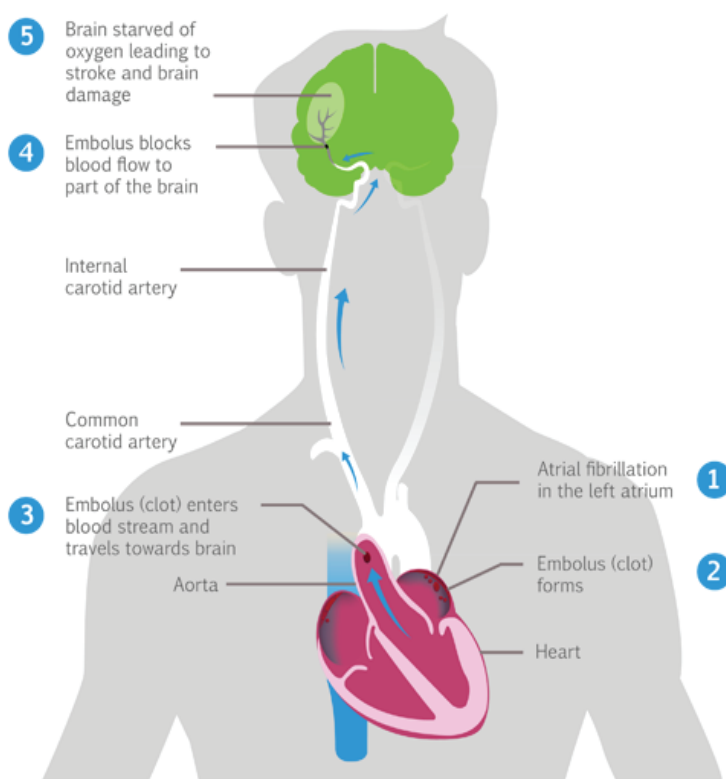


Figure 2

## Why does AFib make me at risk for Stroke?

When blood pools in the heart, it increases your risk for blood clots to form. These blood clots can then become dislodged and travel anywhere in the body. As these clots travel, they can get stuck and stop blood flow. If the blockage is in the brain, it can cause a stroke. AFib increases the risk of stroke five-fold.

## Spot a Stroke F.A.S.T<sup>2</sup>

If you or a loved one are at risk for a stroke, you need to learn the signs. F.A.S.T. is an easy way to remember the signs and symptoms of a stroke. When you can spot the signs, you'll know that you need to call 9-1-1 for help. The sooner a stroke victim gets to the hospital, the sooner they'll get treatment, which can make a difference in their recovery.

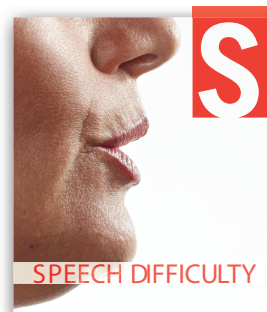
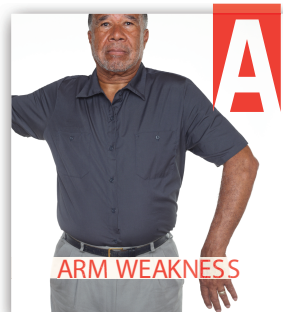


Figure 3

**Face Drooping:** Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile.

**Arm Weakness:** Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**Speech Difficulty:** Is speech slurred, are they unable to speak, or are they hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like "the sky is blue." Is the sentence repeated correctly?

**Time to call 911:** If the person shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get them to the hospital immediately.

## Managing your condition<sup>3</sup>

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Heart rhythm can be difficult to control. The longer you have untreated AFib, the less likely it is that normal rhythm can be reestablished. Additional medications may be prescribed to control heart rate and rhythm.

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### **Additional information on atrial fibrillation, stroke risk and treatment**

**National Stroke Association: [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)**

**American Heart Association: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)**

**Heart Rhythm Society: [www.hrsonline.org](http://www.hrsonline.org)**

**Stop Afib: [www.stopafib.org](http://www.stopafib.org)**

#### **Picture Credits**

1. Reprinted from Atrial Fibrillation Patient Resources Web Site. <http://a-fib.com/overview-of-a-fib/>. Accessed July 11, 2013
2. Reprinted from Speak About AF Web Site. [www.speakaf.com](http://www.speakaf.com). Accessed July 11, 2013
3. American Heart Association and Ad Council

#### **References**

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2. Spot a Stroke. American Stroke Association Web Site. [http://strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/WarningSigns/Stroke-Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms\\_UCM\\_308528\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/WarningSigns/Stroke-Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms_UCM_308528_SubHomePage.jsp). Accessed April 15, 2013.
3. Treatment and Prevention of Atrial Fibrillation. American Heart Association Web Site. Updated: Mar 29, 2012