



ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

PATIENT INFORMATION



ATRIAL FIBRILLATION [AF]

WHEN THE HEART BEATS IN AN IRREGULAR WAY

Both the heart rate (the number of beats) and heart rhythm (the pattern of the heart beat) should be regular to ensure your heart is working efficiently.

Heart Rate – the heart normally beats about 60-100 times per minute.

Heart Rhythm – the heart normally beats in a regular, organised rhythm.

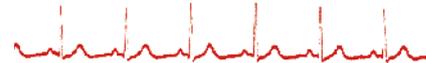
Each heartbeat is started by an electrical charge or impulse.
The impulse moves like a wave, generating a heartbeat.
Normally one wave is generated for each heartbeat.

Atrial Fibrillation – when the electrical activity is chaotic rather than organised.
This always leads to an irregular heart rhythm.

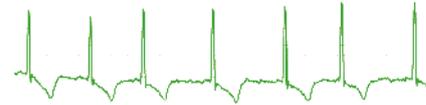
Atrial Flutter – when the top chamber of the heart (atria) beats at a very rapid rate, which is too fast to allow each electrical impulse pass to the bottom chambers (ventricle) of the heart. This can be in a regular or an irregular rhythm.

Atrial Fibrillation is much more common than Atrial Flutter.
Many people with Atrial Flutter also have episodes of Atrial Fibrillation.
The symptoms and treatments for both conditions are very similar.

Sinus Rhythm (normal)



Atrial Fibrillation



Atrial Flutter



Atrial Fibrillation is a common heart disorder affecting more than 40,000 people in Ireland aged over 50;

MANY ARE NOT AWARE THEY HAVE IT

OVER
40,000



+50^{yrs}



Atrial Fibrillation (AF) happens when your heart beats in an irregular way.

AF is often described as an irregular heartbeat or an **arrhythmia**.

When someone has AF, the heart's electrical rhythm is not correctly organised. Different electrical impulses fire rapidly at the same time, which can cause a chaotic rhythm. The pumping action of the heart is effected and as a result blood may not pump as efficiently out of the heart to the rest of the body.

AF is generally not life-threatening but it is a serious condition which can lead to complications such as heart failure and an increased risk of blood clots which may cause stroke.

If you have Atrial Fibrillation you are five times more at risk of having a stroke than someone without atrial fibrillation.



SYMPTOMS

MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE AF HAVE NO SYMPTOMS
AND IT IS DISCOVERED ON A ROUTINE CHECK-UP

Other people experience symptoms which can include:

- Palpitations or fluttering
- Breathlessness
- Dizziness or feeling faint
- Weakness or increased tiredness
- Chest discomfort

If you are concerned, it is a good idea to monitor and keep a diary of any activities or triggers you associate with an episode.

You can discuss this with your doctor.

If you think you have any of the above symptoms please ensure you contact your doctor or call the

Mater Private Urgent Cardiac Care 24 hour helpline 1800 247 999

RISK FACTORS

THE RISK FACTORS WHICH
CONTRIBUTE TO AF ARE

Advancing Age

Heart Failure

High Blood
Pressure

Coronary Artery
Disease

Over Active
Thyroid

Heart & Lung
Surgery

Heart Valve
Disease

Pulmonary
Embolism

Alcohol Abuse

Sleep Apnoea

COMPLICATIONS

COMPLICATIONS DIFFER FROM
PERSON TO PERSON

Complications occur due to the heart pumping in an erratic or uncontrolled manner and also, due to blood not being pumped efficiently around the body.

STROKE

Due to the irregular beating of the heart, clots may form in one of the hearts chambers. These clots may get pumped out of the heart and block blood carrying oxygen to the brain, causing a stroke.

HEART FAILURE

Your heart can be damaged over time by the irregular and disorganised way in which it is beating. This can lead to long-term complications such as heart failure, a symptom of which is breathlessness.

TESTING & DIAGNOSIS

IF YOUR DOCTOR IS CONCERNED YOU WILL BE REFERRED TO A CONSULTANT CARDIOLOGIST WITH EXPERTISE IN ELECTROPHYSIOLOGY FOR FURTHER EVALUATION AND TESTING



ECG (Electrocardiogram) measures the electrical activity of your heart and captures the rate and rhythm in a tracing.

24/48 hour ECG Monitor records your ECG over a 24/48 hour period.

Echo (Echocardiogram) is an ultrasound scan which looks at the structure of your heart, the muscle, the valves and how it is beating.

Stress Test takes a recording of your heart rate and rhythm, using an ECG, while you are exercising on a treadmill or an exercise bike. Exercise can raise your heart rate which may help show any arrhythmias.

Event Monitor is a device that is used over time to record the ECG tracing when you are experiencing an arrhythmia. Some event monitors are implanted under the skin for several months.

EP Study (Electrophysiology Study) is a procedure used to study the electrical function of the heart. It helps identify where in the heart the abnormal electrical signals are originating from.

Coronary Angiogram is a procedure which examines the coronary arteries in your heart to see if there is any narrowing caused by heart disease.

MANAGING & TREATING ATRIAL FIBRILLATION



MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

Medications including “anti-arrhythmics” to control heart rate and rhythm, and “anti-coagulants” to prevent clotting.

CHEMICAL CARIOVERSION

This is the use of medication to bring your heart rate back to its normal rhythm. These medicines are given either orally or intravenously.

ELECTRICAL CARIOVERSION

This is a procedure carried out under general anaesthetic. A series of controlled electrical signals are passed through the heart muscle via electrodes applied to the chest. This helps to restore the heart beat to a normal and controlled rhythm.

CATHETER ABLATION

This is an invasive procedure used to permanently interrupt an abnormal electrical rhythm. Once the source of the abnormal signal is identified, its pathway is blocked by scar tissue which is created using an electrical energy. This blockage prevents the abnormal electrical signal from traveling and so stops the arrhythmia. This procedure may be required more than once.

Arrhythmia Clinic

1800 200 550

arrhythmia@materprivate.ie

Rapid access by GP referral to a Consultant Electrophysiologist with specialist expertise in advance treatments of AF. You or your doctor can contact us directly for an appointment.

Urgent Cardiac Care

1800 247 999

If you or someone you know experiences Palpitations, Breathlessness or Chest Pain, a cardiac specialist nurse is waiting to speak to you, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and our team are ready to care for you.

