



## ATRIAL FIBRILLATION PATIENT INFORMATION



### **Q. What is atrial fibrillation**

AF is the most common type of abnormal heartbeat, People with AF have an irregular and sometimes fast pulse. This happens because instead of the hearts natural pacemaker sending out regular electrical impulses, the impulses come from different places in the atria (The upper chambers of the heart) .This causes the atria to fibrillate which means to quiver or twitch.

### **Q.What are the signs and symptoms of AF**

Palpitations, tiredness, dizziness, chestpains – usually on exertion but possibly also at rest. Breathlessness – often the first symptom to develop, may occur at any time or just on exertion. However some people especially the elderly may have no symptoms at all.

Atrial fibrillation may be persistent, normally the case in those with existing heart disease, or paroxysmal (comes and goes) normally the case in younger patients with normal heart structure.

### **Q. What are the causes of AF?**

The main causes are age especially older than 65yrs, with coronary heart disease, High blood pressure, and Heart failure, there are other causes such as over active thyroid. Excessive alcohol some people have familial predisposition.

### **Q. how common is AF**

It is common and mainly occurs in older people, 50,000 cases are diagnosed each year in the UK. About 1 in 200 people age 50 to 60yrs have AF; this rises to 1 in 10 people aged over 80yrs.

### **Q What are the complications of AF**

It can increase the risk of a blood clot forming inside the chambers of the heart, which can lead to a stroke, other factors which can contribute to a stroke are smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity being overweight and diabetes.

### **Q. What can I expect at the medical practice?**

Your doctor will ask you to have tests to confirm the diagnosis, you will have an ECG (electrocardiogram) this is a painless test that takes 5mins with the nurse that gives a tracing of the electrical activity of your heart. You may have an echocardiogram- (heart scan ) again a short painless test , some patients may have heart monitor fitted ( holter monitor)over a 24 hour period , again this is a painless test which records an eeg while you carry on your normal daily life. You will have blood tests, your GP may also start you on tablets to keep you blood thin and control your heart rate and rhythm.

Atrial fibrillation can be treated in a number of ways, but the different types of treatment are not suitable for everyone. Your GP or a cardiologist will tell you which treatment is suitable for you, the aims of treatment are to reduce your risk of developing a blood clot and treating your heart rhythm.

- ✓ You will receive a letter asking you to attend for annual review with the nurse
- ✓ This appointment will last for approximately 20 minutes
- ✓ The nurse will check your blood pressure, pulse and will listen to your heart.
- ✓ You will also be asked about your medication and any symptoms you may have.
- ✓ You will be asked about your smoking status and general advice on healthy lifestyle may be given.

### **Q. What can I do?**

- ✓ Attend for reviews
- ✓ Take your medication as advised
- ✓ Stop smoking
- ✓ Limit alcohol intake
- ✓ Eat a healthy balanced diet
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight
- ✓ Keep as active as you are able to

**Q. Where can I find more information**

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

14 fitzharding St  
London W1h 6DH

[www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

Atrial fibrillation society

PO box 1219

Chew Magna

Bristol BS40 8WB

[www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk](http://www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk)



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