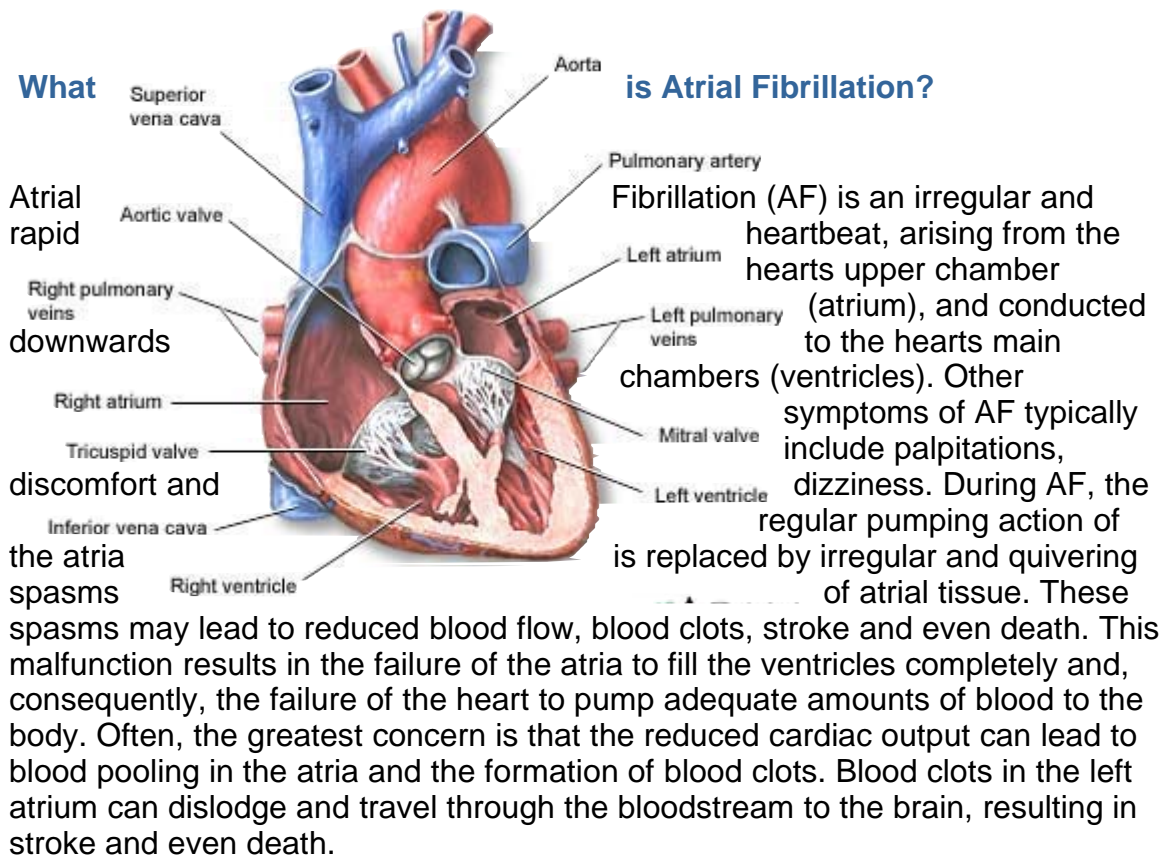


# Atrial Fibrillation



## Causes

- Atherosclerosis of coronary arteries, with or without a previous heart attack
- Hyperthyroidism
- Congestive heart failure
- Rheumatic heart disease caused by rheumatic fever
- Stress

- Chronic lung disease

## Signs & Symptoms

- Continuously irregular heartbeat, in which no 2 beats are of equal strength or duration
- Weak, dizziness or faintness
- Occasionally, no symptoms

## Associated Factors

- Stress
- Recent surgery
- Pulmonary embolism
- Electrolyte disturbances, especially low potassium
- Excessive use of thyroid hormones, caffeine and or alcohol
- Smoking
- Excessive weight

## How is atrial fibrillation treated?

Aspirin and warfarin are two medications currently used. They interfere with blood clotting, thus helping to reduce stroke risk in people with atrial fibrillation. Anticoagulants are also given to people who have atrial fibrillation.

## Recommendations

Treating atrial fibrillation is an important way to help prevent stroke. For this reason, aggressive treatment of this heart arrhythmia is recommended.

- A patient who has atrial fibrillation should be treated by his or her physician with some form of preventive medication.
- Aspirin and warfarin, the currently used medications, can have a major beneficial effect on public health.

## Prevention

- Maintain a low-fat diet
- Stop smoking
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake
- Lose weight
- Some symptoms require medication
- Reduce stress

## Precautions

- Diagnostic tests include electrocardiogram and blood studies to measure levels of drugs used in treatments
- Be sure family and friends are familiar with CPR in case of cardiac arrest

- Electric shock may restore normal rhythm
- Learn to check your own pulse for rate & rhythm
- Avoid non-prescription decongestants

### **Physical Activities**

- As symptoms improve, resume your normal physical activities
- A regular exercise program is recommended

### **Diet**

- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Do not use appetite suppressants
- Maintain a low-fat, low-sodium diet

### **Possible Complications**

- Arterial thrombosis or embolus
- Acute pulmonary edema
- Congestive heart failure
- Other heart beat irregularities that could trigger cardiac arrest