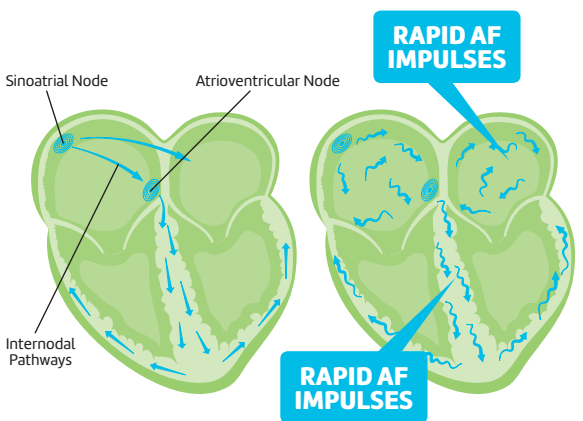


Atrial Fibrillation

What is Atrial Fibrillation (AF)?

With AF, your heart's electrical impulses lose their regular rhythm. The impulses no longer come from the sinus node. Instead, they come from other parts of the atria. When someone is in AF, they have an irregular heartbeat.

During AF, the impulses are very rapid (more than 300 beats per minute) and uneven. In response to these impulses, the atria contract quickly and unevenly. This means they aren't able to pump blood the way they should.



Normal ECG



Atrial Fibrillation

In AF, the atria quiver like a bowl of gelatin, instead of pumping rhythmically and forcefully. Sometimes rapid AF impulses cross to the ventricles. This causes them to beat rapidly and irregularly as well. However, this ventricular rate is much slower than the atrial rate. It usually ranges from 120 to 160 beats per minute.

What Causes Atrial Fibrillation?

AF often affects people who have coronary heart disease or who've had a heart attack. Other conditions linked with AF include:

- ✓ High blood pressure
- ✓ Recent heart surgery
- ✓ Valvular heart disease (affecting one or more of the valves)
- ✓ Inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) or lining of the heart (pericarditis)
- ✓ The risk of AF increases with age. Atrial fibrillation is the most common heart arrhythmia in persons over the age of 65
- ✓ Diabetes, excessive alcohol use and stimulant drug use are other factors that increase the risk of AF

How does AF cause a stroke?

During AF, some blood may not be pumped from the atria into the ventricles efficiently because the atria are quivering like a bowl of gelatin instead of pumping forcefully and rhythmically. Blood that's left behind can pool in the atria and form blood clots. If a blood clot leaves the heart and enters the bloodstream, it can travel to your brain, block an artery or blood vessel in the brain and cause a stroke.

Everyone with AF is at risk for a stroke, but some people are at greater risk than others. These include individuals who have already had a stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA) as well as people over age 75 and those with hypertension, heart failure, or diabetes.

Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation

- ✓ Some people who have AF don't feel a thing. Others notice changes in their heartbeat right away.
- ✓ Many people feel a fast, uncomfortable, irregular heartbeat. It's sometimes described as a "flopping" or "fluttering" feeling in the chest.
- ✓ Dizziness, sweating and chest pain or pressure also can occur, particularly when the ventricular rate is rapid.



*For more Stroke and
General Health Information
please scan the QR codes*

