

# AFib Discussion Guide

## Take Charge of

## Your Atrial Fibrillation

by learning more about your condition and working with your health care team

Atrial fibrillation, also called AFib, is the most common type of irregular heartbeat that often causes the heart to beat too quickly.<sup>1</sup>

During a normal heartbeat, the upper chambers (atria) and lower chambers (ventricles) of the heart work together to pump blood to the rest of the body. AFib occurs when the upper chambers of the heart beat irregularly and do not pump all of the blood to the lower chambers, causing some blood to pool and potentially form clots. If a clot breaks loose, it can travel through the bloodstream to the brain and lead to a stroke.<sup>1,2</sup>



**Strokes related to AFib are often more severe compared to strokes with other underlying causes.<sup>1</sup>**

## Risk Factors for Stroke

There are several factors that can impact the chance of having a stroke in AFib patients.



**Older age<sup>3,4</sup>**



**Female sex<sup>3</sup>**



**Heart failure<sup>5</sup>**



**High blood pressure<sup>6</sup>**



**Diabetes<sup>7</sup>**



**Previous stroke<sup>3,6</sup>**



**Vascular disease<sup>3</sup>**



**Overweight/Obesity<sup>3</sup>**



**Lifestyle behaviors (smoking, physical inactivity, too much alcohol)<sup>3,8</sup>**

Other risk factors may be considered such as family history, genetics, and race/ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

**Your health care provider can determine your individual risk for stroke.**

## AFib Management Options



**Taking medicines** depends on your treatment goals to:

- Control your heart rate<sup>9</sup>
- Restore your heart rhythm<sup>10</sup>
- Lower your risk of stroke with a blood thinner (anticoagulant)<sup>10</sup>



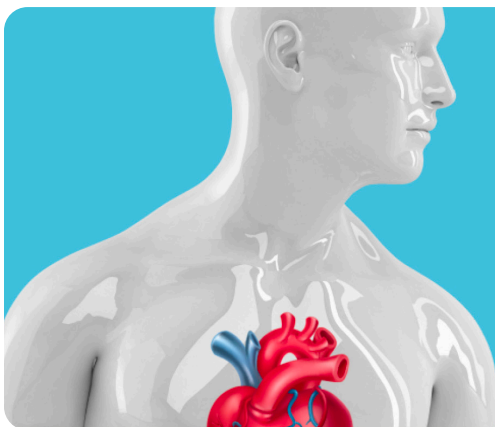
**Lifestyle changes** are behaviors you can change to help maintain your health<sup>10</sup>:

- Follow a reduced salt diet
- Increase your physical activity
- Lower stress
- Keep a healthy weight
- Quit smoking
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and drug use



**Procedures and/or surgery** may help treat your AFib and keep your heart beating normally. Some procedures include<sup>10</sup>:

- Electrical cardioversion
- Catheter ablation
- Inserting a pacemaker
- Plugging, closing, or cutting off the left atrial appendage



People with AFib have up to **5 times greater risk** for stroke than those who do not have AFib.<sup>11,12</sup>

Talk to your health care provider about the options to manage your AFib and risk of stroke.

### Questions to Consider Asking Your Doctor During Your Appointment

Select from the following:

- ☐ What is AFib, and how did I get this condition?
- ☐ What treatment options are available for AFib?
- ☐ What is the most appropriate treatment for me to help manage my AFib?
- ☐ Would I benefit from a blood thinner to reduce the risk of stroke?
- ☐ What are the risks and benefits of taking the medicine recommended?
- ☐ What lifestyle changes can I make to help manage my condition?
- ☐ How often will I need to have a follow-up appointment or testing?
- ☐ Are there any warning signs or symptoms I should watch out for?
- ☐ Can I still exercise and engage in physical activity with AFib?
- ☐ Should I avoid any foods, drinks, or activities?

**References:** 1. Atrial fibrillation: what is atrial fibrillation? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated October 14, 2022. Accessed May 24, 2023. [https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/atrial\\_fibrillation.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/atrial_fibrillation.htm) 2. What is atrial fibrillation? National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Updated November 30, 2022. Accessed May 24, 2023. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/atrial-fibrillation> 3. Know your risk for stroke. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed May 24, 2023. [https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/risk\\_factors.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/risk_factors.htm) 4. National Center for Health Statistics. Mortality data on CDC WONDER Database. Accessed July 26, 2023. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd.html> 5. Fohtung RB, Rich MW. Identification of patients at risk of stroke from atrial fibrillation. *US Cardiology Review*. 2016;10(2):60-64. doi:10.15420/usc.2016:1:1 6. Hindricks G, Potpara T, Dagres N, et al. 2020 ESC Guidelines for the diagnosis and management of atrial fibrillation developed in collaboration with the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery (EACTS): the Task Force for the diagnosis and management of atrial fibrillation of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) developed with the special contribution of the European Heart Rhythm Association (EHRA) of the ESC. *Eur Heart J*. 2021;42(5):373-498. doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehaa612 7. Stroke Risk in Atrial Fibrillation Working Group. Independent predictors of stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation: a systematic review. *Neurology*. 2007;69(6):546-554. doi:10.1212/01.wnl.0000267275.68538.8d 8. Stroke: causes and risk factors. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Accessed May 24, 2023. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/stroke/causes> 9. Atrial fibrillation medicines. American Heart Association. Updated March 27, 2023. Accessed July 26, 2023. <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/atrial-fibrillation/treatment-and-prevention-of-atrial-fibrillation/atrial-fibrillation-medications> 10. Atrial fibrillation: treatment. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Accessed May 24, 2023. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/atrial-fibrillation/treatment> 11. Wolf PA, Abbott RD, Kannel WB. Atrial fibrillation as an independent risk factor for stroke: the Framingham Study. *Stroke*. 1991;22(8):983-988. doi:10.1161/01.STR.22.8.983 12. January CT, Wann LS, Alpert JS, et al. 2014 AHA/ACC/HRS guideline for the management of patients with atrial fibrillation. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2014;64(21):e1-e76. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2014.03.022