

Living with Atrial Fibrillation

Chuck Kaplan describes himself as an intense exerciser. As a young man he committed to working out every day for the rest of his life.

"I do about an hour and a half of aerobics every day, and then maybe another half hour of muscle work, weight work. I've exercised every day for 45 years, and then I show up with this heart condition." – Chuck, Patient

The heart condition is an abnormal heart rhythm known as atrial fibrillation, or A-fib, which results from chaotic electrical signals in the atria – or upper chambers – that cause the heart to beat out of rhythm. Chuck was diagnosed during a routine medical procedure several months ago.

"I just didn't expect it. You know, I thought I was immortal." – Chuck, Patient

Staying physically active, as Chuck has done, can help you manage A-fib. So can eating a healthful diet, controlling your weight and blood pressure, and managing stress.

It's also important to get treated if you have sleep apnea, a condition in which breathing stops repeatedly during the night. Many people with A-fib also have sleep apnea.

"If there's any concern that you might have sleep apnea, you need to be screened for it if you have not been."
- Kimberly Champney, MD, Cardiologist

In addition, limit alcohol, caffeine or other things, including certain dietary supplements, that can trigger or make your A-fib worse.

"Some of the herbal supplements do have a few stimulant properties to them and they may be causing A-fib."
- Kimberly Champney, MD, Cardiologist

Follow your medication instructions carefully, especially if you take blood thinning medications, known as anticoagulants. There can be harmful effects if you use these medications along with certain other medicines or dietary supplements.

So be sure to tell your health care provider about everything you're taking.

Foods such as broccoli and leafy green vegetables, which are high in vitamin k, can also interfere with certain blood thinning medications. It's okay to eat these foods, but keep the amount the same from day to day.

Be careful to avoid cutting yourself, since blood thinning medications reduce your blood's ability to clot. Call your health care provider if you have bleeding that won't stop, blood in your urine or stool, abdominal pain or swelling, or unexplained bruises.

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Keep important contact information handy and also call your provider if you experience symptoms including heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling in the feet

Performing in a rock band with co-workers is another passion for Chuck that he's not about to give up. However, he's had to make a few adjustments.

"There are some songs where the singing is really intense and continuous..." – Chuck, Patient

"... WHOAH!"

"...where now I've had to start marking my lyric sheets with a place where to breathe particularly if I'm in A-fib and singing, then I am going to have to breathe more often." – Chuck, Patient

Various treatments are available to help control A-fib. And as Chuck realized once he accepted his diagnosis, it's possible to lead a full, healthy life with the condition.

"They really isolated it and got it down to the point where they took care of it. So, just by going with it and not fighting it, it's like OK, this is the new normal. Here I am!" – Chuck, Patient