

# **Basic Facts About Atrial Fibrillation**

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Atrial Fibrillation, or AFib, is a common heart condition that increases the risk for stroke. However, patients with AFib can live long and healthy lives. Come watch as I talk to a patient about how to live with AFib.

Hey Bob. It's good to see you again.

**Bob**

You too, Doc.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Yeah how have you been since your recent discharge from the hospital?

**Bob**

Pretty good Doc, but I have a whole lot of questions on this AFib thing.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Yeah well certainly can be pretty overwhelming. I'll tell you what, why don't we go through some of the key concepts. Why don't we start with monitoring your heart rate? Do you remember how to do that?

**Bob**

I think so, but can we go over it again?

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Absolutely. So I'll tell you what, most people find it easiest to use your index and middle finger and place it on the outer part of the wrist. You can feel the pulse there, right? The thing to do is to practice this at home, and encourage your wife to learn how to check your heart rate.

**Bob**

I think I got that.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Now the average and usual heart rate is between eighty and a hundred and ten beats per minute. And if it goes much higher than that I need you to call me.

**Bob**

Okay.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Of course when you exercise you can expect it to go higher than that. And I'd let your symptoms be your guide. So if you can hold a conversation and do so comfortably while your exercising, you're probably not overdoing it. Now as for exercise I'd pick things that you enjoy like riding a stationary bicycle, or walking, or doing yoga. Just use common sense and don't pick anything that might increase your risk for falling and getting hurt and bleeding.

**Bob**

That's great to know because I can't wait to get back to exercising again.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Why don't we turn to diet. It's important to stay on a heart-healthy diet. That's one that's low in saturated fat and salt, and high in fruits and vegetables. Now, importantly, you don't want to vary it too much day-to-day. And it's especially critical if you're on a blood thinner called Warfarin. If you vary

your diet too much on Warfarin you increase your risk for bleeding or having a stroke. Some of the newer prescription medications for blood clot prevention don't have that diet problem.

**Bob**

I got it.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

All right, now alcohol, I would probably limit yourself to one drink a day. And you know some people can't even have that. They're too sensitive to it.

**Bob**

Okay.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

I would be very careful if you catch a cold and take some cold medicine, because some of the cold medicine active ingredients can actually increase the trouble with Atrial Fibrillation. It can increase the speed of your heart. So just read the labels and you'll be safe.

**Bob**

I understand.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

All right so you want to look for labels that say, "safe for high blood pressure", and if you have any questions just give me a call.

**Bob**

Will do.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

All right. Now as for calling me in general, if you get symptoms of atrial fibrillation: palpitations, shortness of breath, or dizziness, call me.

**Bob**

Absolutely.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

So now if you're having symptoms of a stroke, which is the most feared complication of Atrial fibrillation, you need to call 911 and get to the emergency room as quickly as possible.

**Bob**

What are the symptoms of a stroke, Doc?

**Doron Schneider, MD**

Well that's a good question. So it's a drooping of the face, an inability to raise an arm or a leg, or slurred speech.

**Bob**

I understand.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

All right. Well now listen, we've started you on a bunch of new medications after the discharge, including the blood thinner. So it's really important that you take the medicines exactly as prescribed, and not miss any doses. Do you have a strategy that might help you do that?

**Bob**

Well for me, I fill my pill tray every Sunday morning before I go to church and I put my pill tray along with my tooth brush so that when I brush my teeth every morning, I take my medicine at the exact same time.

**Doron Schneider, MD**

That is a great plan.

Smart life choices can keep people with atrial fibrillation healthy and out of the hospital. If you have any questions about AFib, talk to your own healthcare team.

I'm Doctor Doron Schneider and this has been another tip to help you live a healthier life.