

Managing Stroke Risk with AFib

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Hi, Mrs. Williams. How are you today?

Mrs. Williams, Patient

I'm well, thank you.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Great. Great. Well, I wanted to talk to you today about how atrial fibrillation can lead to strokes and what we can do about that. All strokes are really bad, but the strokes that come from Afib can be particularly bad, and so it's really important that we help to manage that, to try to prevent that complication.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Okay, well, I want to know and do whatever I can to reduce the risk.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Yeah. One thing to know about is what the risk factors are for stroke, when you have Afib.

There are a number of things that can increase your risk for stroke, and when you have more than one of them, your risk goes up. Some of the risks are having high blood pressure, diabetes, heart failure, having had a stroke in the past, having other arterial disease, or being over the age of 65.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

So how could I prevent that from happening?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

There are a lot of things that you can do. So, you can't help it if you've had a stroke before. You can't, you know, affect your age, but there are a lot of things that you can do, and that I understand that you are doing. You can have a healthier lifestyle, and eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and those things will help your high blood pressure and diabetes. It's also really important to take your medications, including the medications that reduce your chances for making clots. That can really help prevent strokes.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

What is a stroke, actually?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

So, a stroke is like a brain attack. When a person has atrial fibrillation, they can make blood clots in their heart, and sometimes those blood clots break off and travel in the body. And when a blood clot travels up to your brain, it can close off the circulation and the blood supply to that part of the brain and that part of the brain starts to die. So, it's really important to know what the symptoms of a stroke are so that you call 9-1-1 right away, so you can get help immediately, because it can be very serious.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

So, I, I really need to watch out for stroke. What's the best to prevent a stroke?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Well, taking your medications is a very important part of managing your atrial fibrillation. The medications include blood thinners that help prevent clots that can then lead to stroke.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

How will I know if I'm having a stroke?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

There are lots of different types of symptoms. Including arm weakness, or where your face droops, or you have trouble speaking. You might have trouble with your balance or trouble with your vision. Here's a reminder that I use for patients so that they can be aware of some stroke symptoms: FAST. F is for facial drooping, A is for arm weakness, S is for slurred speech or difficulty speaking, and T is it's time to call 9-1-1, if you have any of those symptoms so you can get treatment right away.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Why do I have to call 9-1-1 right away?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Well, when you're having a stroke, the longer you wait to get treatment, the more likely you are to have permanent damage.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

So, let me say this back to you then. F is for your face. If your face is drooping. A is for your arm, if there's any weakness. S is if your speech is slurred, and then I should just call 9-1-1.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Right. That's the T. Yep. Time to call 9-1-1

Mrs. Williams, Patient

And, you know, I think I'll share this with my family so they can recognize if I'm having a stroke as well.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

That's a great idea. I think it's wonderful how you're taking control over managing your atrial fibrillation. And it's really important that you know the signs and symptoms of a stroke and what to do should they occur.

Well, it was great to see you.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

See you as well. See you next time.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

All right.