

# What Is Atrial Fibrillation?

The heart has its own electrical system that helps keep the heart in rhythm and helps control how fast it beats. Atrial fibrillation, or a-fib, causes the upper chambers of your heart, called the atria, to quiver or fibrillate.

It happens because tiny areas of heart tissue send extra electrical signals. And that upsets the steady rhythm of your heartbeat. Your heart may beat faster than it normally does. When you don't have a strong, steady heartbeat, it's a problem for a couple of reasons.

First, it increases your risk of stroke. That's because blood can pool in your heart and form clots. And if a clot travels to your brain, that can cause a stroke.

Second, when your heartbeat isn't in rhythm, for example if it's beating too fast, the heart may get weak. And that can lead to heart failure. Now, failure doesn't mean your heart stops.

It means that your heart doesn't pump as much blood as your body needs. So, you can see why treating a-fib is so important. It helps lower your risk of stroke and heart failure, and it helps you feel better and live safely with this heart condition.

Now, treatment can include medicines, procedures, or heart-healthy lifestyle changes. Treatment can be one or two of these things or a combination of things. Let's look at each type of treatment.

Medicines work to control the heart rate and rhythm, and lower your risk of stroke. And procedures may be done to get the heartbeat back to a normal rhythm. One procedure is called cardioversion. It uses a mild shock to get your heartbeat back to normal.

The other procedure is ablation, which destroys those tiny areas of heart tissue that send out the extra electrical signals. You can also help manage a-fib with a heart-healthy lifestyle. This includes healthy eating, losing weight, being active, limiting alcohol, and not smoking.

Healthy habits may help reduce how often you have episodes of atrial fibrillation and help you live better. And if you are overweight, losing weight can help relieve symptoms.

So, whatever treatment you and your doctor decide on, the goal is to get you back to feeling better and to prevent future problems. Then you can look forward to better health.