

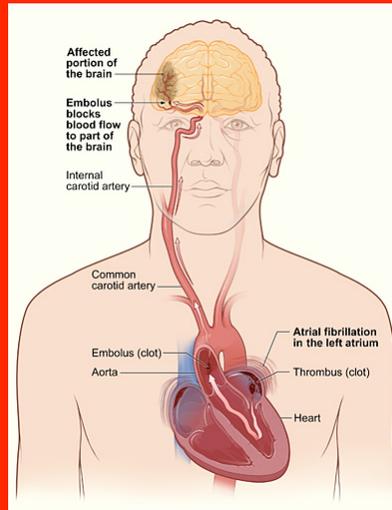
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Understanding Atrial Fibrillation

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What is atrial fibrillation?

- Atrial fibrillation is a common heart problem in the United States, and affects almost 1% of people. As we age, the chance of having this condition increases.
- In a normal heart, an electrical signal starts in the upper two chambers of the heart (called 'atria'). Then the signal travels to the lower two chambers (called 'ventricle').
- The electrical system helps your heart muscle flex.
- When the heart muscle flexes, blood is pumped out of the heart and into the rest of the body.
- When the electrical system of the heart is not functioning properly it is difficult for the muscle to pump blood into the body.



<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/af/diagnosis.html>

- In atrial fibrillation the electrical signal from the atria is irregular. The muscles do not flex together.
- When the muscles do not flex together the chamber will enlarge and blood flow will slow down. If blood remains stationary for too long it will form a clot.
- Blood clots that form in the heart can break off into smaller pieces. After it breaks off it travels to other parts of the body.
- If the clot travels to your brain, the blood flow to a part of the brain may be blocked. This is called a stroke.

What are the symptoms?

- Fatigue
- Feeling like your heart is racing
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Confusion

How can my doctor tell if I have atrial fibrillation?

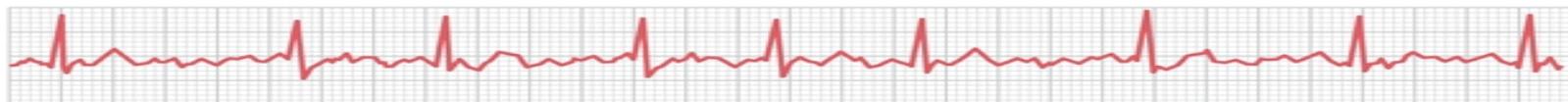
- An EKG (recording of the heart's electrical system) can be done. It is simple and painless.
- In atrial fibrillation the heartbeat becomes irregular.

How is this condition treated?

- Prevent blood clots from forming with a medication called warfarin. This reduces the risk of stroke by two thirds.
- Slow a rapid heart rate. This reduces the stress on the heart.
- Convert the rhythm to normal. This can be done with medications, electrical current, or minor surgery.

Other resources:

- NIH website - www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/af/
- Uptodate.com search atrial fibrillation.



This is an EKG showing atrial fibrillation. [Link](#) to source website.