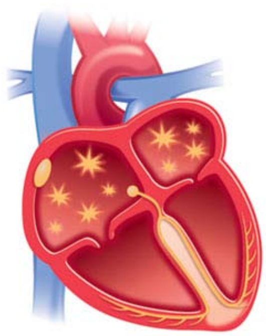
So I have atrial fibrillation…

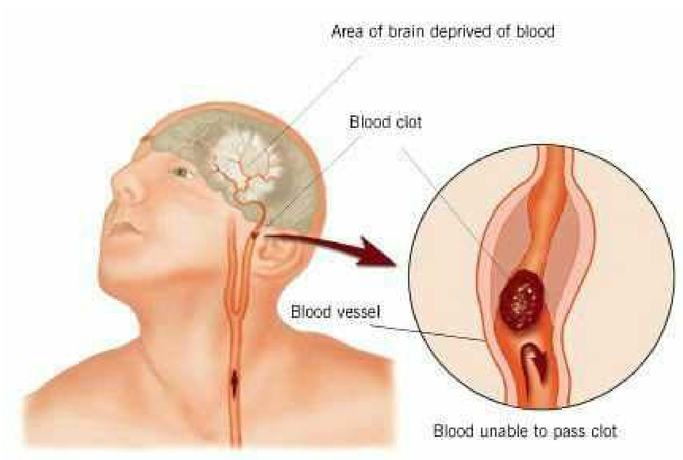
What does this mean?



*1

-Your heart has four chambers; the bottom two, called “ventricles” do most of the work of pumping blood to your body while the top two, called “atria”, help move blood to the ventricles. In atrial fibrillation, the top two chambers quiver instead of pumping at the same rate as the ventricles. The ventricles, though, are almost always still able to pump plenty of blood to your body to keep you feeling well even if the atria are quivering.

What’s all this I hear about atrial fibrillation and stroke?



*2

-Because the atria quiver instead of pumping at a regular rate, some blood might pool next to the wall of the atria. Blood that that does not move tends to clot, and in some patients with atrial fibrillation a clot will form along the wall of one of their atria. This clot may break apart, with parts going down into the ventricles, where they are pumped to the rest of the body. If one of these bits of clot travels to the brain, it may block an artery, much like a plug in a hose. Blocking a brain artery blocks blood to a part of the brain, causing damage. This is what happens in a stroke.

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


*3

-Signs and symptoms of stroke include:

-sudden weakness or numbness, especially on one side of the body
-sudden vision loss or suddenly blurred vision
-sudden massive headache
-sudden confusion
-sudden trouble speaking or trouble hearing or understanding language
-sudden dizziness or lightheadedness

-If you experience any of these, call **911 immediately** – the **sooner** a stroke is treated, the **less likely** it is that there will be long-term brain damage.

-For further stroke information, see the pamphlet available in this clinic, or visit:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stroke/DS00150/DSECTION=symptoms>

How can I prevent a stroke?


*4

-One way to reduce the risk of stroke in atrial fibrillation is to make it less likely that a clot forms in the first place. Blood thinners are the main treatments for this, and options include an aspirin a day, or other blood thinners like warfarin (also known as Coumadin) or dabigatran (also known as Pradaxa), among others. Your personal cardiologist, family physician, or internal medicine physician will help you decide which option is best for you.

*1http://www.corvascmds.com/atrial_fibrillation.htm
*2: http://forwardedemail.wordpress.com/2008/05/30/fwfwdvery-informative-you-just-never-know-blood-clotstroke-please-read/
*3: Colt Edin, personal collection
*4http://bayazidt.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/pill_bottle_and_pills1.jpg
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