

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

UNDERSTANDING ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

TRANSCRIPT

Atrial Fibrillation is a type of rapid, irregular heartbeat.

Although some people can have atrial fibrillation and feel fine, others may develop symptoms like: palpitations, an awareness of their own rapid heartbeat, dizziness, shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling in the feet.

Regardless of how you feel, atrial fibrillation needs to be treated right away. Otherwise, serious complications can develop.

The heart is a remarkable organ. It is a muscle that relaxes and contracts, pumping blood carrying oxygen and nutrients throughout the body. The steady rhythm of these contractions is controlled by electrical impulses that travel through the heart, first through the upper chambers, called the atria; and then through the lower chambers, called the ventricles. In order to reach the ventricles, electrical impulses must pass here, at the atrioventricular, or AV node.

Atrial fibrillation occurs when a storm of electrical impulses spread through the atria in a chaotic and disorganized pattern, causing the atria to begin rapidly contracting. As a result, the ventricles may also begin contracting faster. When the heart is in atrial fibrillation, the body can't receive the blood and oxygen it needs.

The exact cause of atrial fibrillation is often unknown. In many cases, contributing factors include: high blood pressure, heart disease, congestive heart failure, damage resulting from a heart attack or heart surgery, and age.

Sometimes, episodes can be triggered by harmful substances, like alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine. For some people atrial fibrillation may only last a short time, but continue to reappear. In some cases it can even become permanent. This is called Chronic Atrial Fibrillation.

Left untreated, atrial fibrillation can cause blood clots that can lead to a stroke. Over time, a rapid heart rate can also weaken the lower chambers of the heart, causing other health problems.