

10 steps you can take to manage atrial fibrillation



Atrial fibrillation | Information handout

Everyone with atrial fibrillation (AFib) is different, but these steps can help manage it well:

-  1. **Take your medicines as directed and set a reminder if needed.** Remember that your medications may need to be changed over time – even after they've worked for a while. Talk with your health care team if you have concerns about side effects or paying for your medicines, or if you have a preference for when and how often to take them.
-  2. **Listen to your body and let your health care team know if you start to feel worse.** For example, if your heart is beating more unevenly, you have trouble breathing, feel unusually tired or lightheaded, or notice any swelling in your legs or feet. Keep track of how often your symptoms occur, what you feel at the time and how they affect what you are able to do. Use the "[Keeping Track of Symptoms and How AFib Affects Your Life](#)" worksheet to help.
-  3. **Make sure you are taking a blood thinner if one has been prescribed to you – even if you feel OK.** With AFib, blood doesn't flow through the heart as it should. Blood can pool and clump together, possibly forming clots. These blood clots, or pieces of them, can break free, travel to the brain and cause a stroke.
-  4. **Adopt heart-healthy habits.** For example, getting regular exercise, eating well, not smoking, and lowering stress.
-  5. **Limit or cut out alcohol altogether.** For many people, alcohol can trigger AFib episodes or make them worse.
-  6. **Lose weight if needed.** Studies show that shedding extra pounds is tied to fewer AFib episodes – even reversing AFib for some. It also helps lower blood pressure, which can reduce the chance of having a stroke.
-  7. **Ask to be screened for sleep apnea.** There is evidence that sleep apnea, a common disorder in which your breathing stops briefly during sleep, may cause or worsen AFib.
-  8. **Stay connected to activities, people and other things that matter.** Try not to live your life in constant worry about your next AFib episode. If you are, talk with your care team. There are strategies that can help.
-  9. **Manage other conditions.** For example, thyroid disease, heart failure, high blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes. Be sure to speak up about any feelings of ongoing sadness or anxiety or if you have trouble sleeping or focusing.
-  10. **Find your village,** those positive people who boost your spirits and will support and advocate for you when needed. Focus on people and activities that bring you joy.