Atrial Fibrillation: Should I Try Cardioversion?

Making health decisions is part of life. These decisions can have a big effect on your health and happiness.

Some decisions may affect how good your health care is. Others may affect how much it costs. Most people feel better about their health care when they take part in these decisions.

This information will help you understand your choices, whether you take part in the decision or ask your doctor to decide. Your decision should be based on the medical facts as well as your own feelings.

Your choices
- You can try cardioversion to get your heart back into a normal rhythm.
- You can decide not to have cardioversion. You can take blood thinners (anticoagulant medicines) to prevent stroke. You may also take medicine to slow a fast heart rate or medicine to control heart rhythm.

Key points in making your decision

There are two types of cardioversion. Electrical cardioversion stops your heart briefly with an electrical current. Chemical cardioversion uses medicines. Both return your heart to a normal rhythm. But atrial fibrillation often returns. Consider the following when you make your decision:
- Cardioversion does not work as well if you have another heart disease, such as heart failure.
- Cardioversion may not work if you have had atrial fibrillation for a while, such as longer than one year.
- If your symptoms bother you a lot, you may want to try cardioversion.
- Be aware that even if cardioversion is successful, you may still need to take blood thinners.
- Risks of this procedure include stroke and a dangerous uneven heartbeat.

Think about the facts and about what matters most to you. To help with your decision, take this information to your doctor and talk with him or her about your thoughts and feelings. Ask for more information if needed.
Reasons to try cardioversion

• You have symptoms of atrial fibrillation that bother you. Examples include fainting, a pounding or fluttering feeling in your chest, and shortness of breath.
• You have not had atrial fibrillation for very long.
• If cardioversion worked for you but you started having symptoms again after some time, you may want to try it again.
• Your doctor advises you that cardioversion is likely to work for you.

Reasons not to try cardioversion

• You have another heart disease that caused atrial fibrillation.
• You do not have symptoms of atrial fibrillation.
• You have tried cardioversion at least once, and atrial fibrillation quickly came back.
• You have had atrial fibrillation for a long time.

Circle the answers that best apply to you.

| I don't have another heart disease along with atrial fibrillation. | Yes | No | Unsure |
| I have recent symptoms of atrial fibrillation. | Yes | No | Unsure |
| I have not tried cardioversion or have only tried it once. | Yes | No | Unsure |
| I have fainting spells when my heart rhythm is off. | Yes | No | Unsure |
| I feel better when my heart rhythm is normal. | Yes | No | Unsure |

Conclusion

By using what you have just learned, you will be able to make a better decision about cardioversion.

• Learn the facts.
• Consider the pros and cons.

• Ask about costs.
• Talk to your doctor.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.