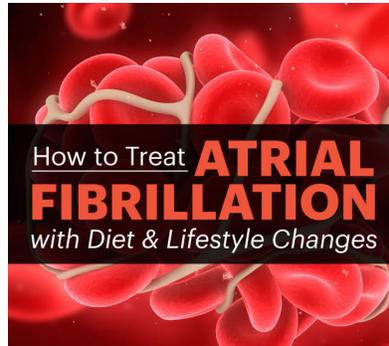




3522 Kaliste Saloom Rd Lafayette, La. 70508 Office: 337-989-0572



**By Dr. Marie Pace, DNM, CNC, HHP**

*Doctor of Naturopathic Ministries, Certified Nutritional Counselor & Holistic Health Practitioner*

Atrial fibrillation (also called AF or “A-fib” for short) is a heart condition that causes the heart to beat in an irregular, sometimes rapid rhythm that can result in poor circulation and other cardiovascular problems. While some people are totally unaware that they have atrial fibrillation and feel no symptoms at all, others experience symptoms that at times can feel pretty scary — including a pounding heart, fluttering in the chest or even the feeling that their heart “is going to explode.”

A new study showed that atrial fibrillation appears to be more common in women than in men, affects adults between the ages of 45–60 most often, and is a strong risk factor for coronary heart disease.

How common are atrial fibrillations? More than 200,000 cases are reported each year in the U.S. alone, and about 33 million worldwide suffer from some form of AF.

Atrial fibrillations are often considered chronic health problems, since symptoms can last for many years or even someone’s entire lifetime. That being said, this condition is usually treatable with a good outcome. A proper diagnoses of AF requires a medical visit and lab or imaging testing, at which point symptoms usually can be managed well with a combination of medications and lifestyle changes — including lowering and relieving stress, reducing inflammation, and improving someone’s diet.

There are three types of AF: **Paroxysmal Atrial Fibrillation** (causes faulty electrical signals and rapid heart rates that usually last under 24 hours), **Persistent Atrial Fibrillation** (continues for more than a week) and **Permanent Atrial Fibrillation** (which can’t be restored with treatment and becomes more frequent over time).

## **Atrial Fibrillation Symptoms**

To “fibrillate” means to contract very fast and irregularly. A heart fibrillation develops due to disorganized electrical signals between the heart’s two chambers. This happens when the heart’s upper chambers (called the atria) beat out of coordination with the lower chambers (ventricles). Another term for this is a heart arrhythmia, which causes an erratic effect on the heartbeat, at times slowing it down but at other times speeding it up.

What does it feel like to have a heart arrhythmia?

For people with atrial fibrillations, a chaotic or rapid heartbeat can mimic the feeling of a pounding heart that’s associated with anxiety, panic attacks or even a heart attack. Besides being uncomfortable, atrial fibrillations can be dangerous if too much blood pools in the atria chambers or forms a blood clot, which stops normal circulation. While not all arrhythmias are dangerous, they can sometimes increase the risk of a stroke or heart failure when the heart rhythm becomes very irregular and rapid.

### **Common atrial fibrillation symptoms include:**

- Chest pains
- Heart palpitations or fast beats
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue, weakness and always feeling tired despite sleeping well
- Dizziness
- Inability to exercise without feeling fatigued or short of breath
- Increased anxiety

Even when the condition is chronic, symptoms of atrial fibrillation are not always present; they usually come and go. The frequency of symptoms depends on the person, with some people only occasionally feeling a rapid or slow heartbeat, while others experience this more often. The biggest risk comes from ongoing or long-term heart problems that persist for years, whether because someone doesn’t notice the symptoms in the first place or chooses not to see a doctor. Most of the symptoms of AF depend on whether the heart is beating faster or slower than normal. Very rapid heartbeats might be more noticeable as well as more dangerous. It’s normal for the heartbeat to slow down somewhat as someone ages, but having it speed up creates a bigger risk for complications.

A chaotic heartbeat affects blood pressure and can lead to blood clots that blocks circulation of blood to other organs (called an ischemia). Blood pooling in the upper chambers of the heart can also increase the risk for a stroke, while a blockage in the lower chamber can contribute to heart failure over time.

## **Risk Factors and Underlying Causes of Atrial Fibrillation**

What causes the heart’s electrical system to misfire in people with fibrillations?

### **According to the American Heart Association, risk factors for atrial fibrillation include:**

- Having a history of heart disease, high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Being 60 years old or greater
- Being a female
- Having a history of diabetes, thyroid disorder, a stroke or vascular diseases (prior heart attack, peripheral artery disease or aortic plaque)
- Being overweight
- Living a sedentary lifestyle
- Having high levels of inflammation

- Eating a poor diet
- Having high amounts of stress and chronic stress
- High exposure to air pollution and toxins
- Smoking cigarettes, or vaping
- A family history of AF

Normally, the rhythm of the heartbeat is controlled through electrical signals that travel through the heart and cause contractions that pump blood at a normal pace. Healthy adults experience a heartbeat about 60–100 times every minute (or sometimes less in athletes) through signals that are sent from the sinus node or sinoatrial node in the heart. The signals travel through the right and left atria, down to the atrioventricular node, then to the ventricles, which finally pump blood to the lungs and elsewhere. In contrast, someone with atrial fibrillation can have a heartbeat of 100–175 times a minute.

The normal heartbeat process described above isn't what takes place in people with atrial fibrillations. Instead, according to the Heart Rhythm Society, electrical signals start in the atria or pulmonary veins where they take on a rapid and disorganized rhythm. This results in a very fast heartbeat that overwhelms the atria and ventricles, causing them to lose coordination and affecting the amount of blood pumped out of the ventricles to the rest of the body. Instead of the organs receiving blood supply at a regular pace, people with AF pump out either small or large amounts of blood at once.

One of the underlying causes of atrial fibrillation is cardiovascular disease. Inflammation associated with heart disease damages the heart's control over electrical signals and therefore impacts normal blood flow. It's a vicious cycle because AF also makes inflammation worse, which contributes to the development of scar tissue in the heart that then worsens the problem.

### **Natural Atrial Fibrillation Plan**

Atrial fibrillations are tested and diagnosed by primary care providers, cardiologists who specialize in heart disorders or geriatricians who treat the elderly. Treatment goals for AF involve resetting normal heartbeat rhythms and preventing blood clots from forming or worsening. Some of the standard medical treatments used to treat patients with AF include:

- Taking prescriptions to thin blood, regulate blood pressure and reduce inflammation
- Electrical shock therapy, which regulates the electrical currents of the heart
- When medications don't work, in some cases surgeries (called ablation) are performed to insert a cardiac monitor or catheter into the heart
- Certain lifestyle changes to control complications and prevent inflammation from worsening

While they can be serious and potentially life threatening for some people, most people who have atrial fibrillations go on to live normal lives. Treatments usually help bring the heartbeat back to normal, which helps control symptoms and lowers the risk for complications. Most people can usually still exercise, work normally and lead active lives, assuming they get clearance from their doctors to do so.

A good holistic practitioner can assist you in making correct lifestyle changes that will greatly enhance correct medical treatments.

Various lifestyle practices can help control arrhythmia symptoms and keep them from getting worse, especially inflammation.

**Inflammation** is one of the major risk factors for conditions like a heart attack, stroke, diabetes,

thyroid disorders and even mood-related disorders.

### **Here are six ways to help control atrial fibrillation symptoms naturally:**

#### **1. Get Your Yearly Checkups**

It's important to stay on top of medical doctor visits as you get older, especially if you have a family history of heart disease or other known risk factors. It's believed that under-diagnosed or under-treated heart disease can contribute to an arrhythmia and its complications. Research shows that women are even more susceptible to risk factors that contribute to heart disease and AF — plus they have a higher mortality risk associated with it. Plan on seeing your Holistic Practitioner at least every 6 months. See your medical doctor at least yearly.

Another reason to visit your medical doctor each year is because research shows that procedures used to correct AF work best if they're implemented soon after diagnosis. Atrial fibrillation is normally first treated with lifestyle changes and medications, but also might require procedures such as an ablation, which is a minimally invasive procedure that uses heat or cold administered through a catheter to electrically disconnect the veins that trigger atrial fibrillation.

According to researchers from the Cleveland Clinic Section of Cardiac Electrophysiology and Pacing, "If the diagnosis has been there for less than one year then the success rate of ablation is up to 80 percent ... it drops down to 50 percent by the time you get to more than 6 years." If an ablation or other procedure is needed, it's best to perform one sooner rather than later in order to improve the outcome and avoid the buildup of scar tissue within the heart.

Below are the points that your holistic doctor will help you with...

#### **2. Eat an Anti-Inflammatory Diet**

One of the leading contributors of heart problems and heart disease is inflammation, which leads to **free radical damage**. **Obesity** also seems to raise the risk for heart problems and AF, which makes it even more important to eat a low-processed, balanced diet. Foods to avoid that promote inflammation most include:

- Refined vegetable oils (like corn, safflower and soybean oils)
- Refined carbohydrates and processed snacks that contain them
- Conventional, factory-farm meat
- Trans Fats
- Added sugars
- Pasteurized, conventional dairy products
- High sodium foods (many packaged foods and fast foods)
- In the case of atrial fibrillations, high amounts of caffeine and alcohol can also make the problem worse. Vulnerability varies from person to person depending on how severe the AF is, but research shows that binge drinking (having five drinks in two hours for men or four drinks for women) puts you at higher risk for AF as does drinking caffeine

**These foods can also increase gastrointestinal disorders, thyroid disorders, autoimmune disorders like leaky gut and diabetes, which are all associated with an increased risk for AF.**

The healthiest type of diet to help prevent heart complications includes the following nutrient-dense, **anti-inflammatory foods** listed below. Most of these foods are included in the **Mediterranean diet**, which is one of the most popular and effective anti-inflammatory diets there is, shown to help reduce symptoms of various cardiovascular diseases and lower cholesterol, blood sugar and triglycerides levels as does a **FLEXITARIAN diet** plan / way of life!

- Fiber-rich and antioxidant-rich vegetables: leafy greens, beets, carrots, cruciferous vegetables

- like Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, artichokes, onions, etc.
- Fruit: all kinds, especially berries and citrus fruits
- Herbs and spices: especially anti-inflammatories like turmeric (curcumin), raw garlic, basil, chili peppers, cinnamon, curry powder, ginger, rosemary and thyme
- Traditional teas: green tea, oolong or white tea
- Legumes and beans
- Heart-**healthy fats**: nuts, seeds, avocados, wild-caught fish, coconut oil and extra virgin olive oil
- **Red wine** and coffee in moderation

### 3. Lower Stress

Stress contributes to inflammation and atrial fibrillation, not to mention many other forms of chronic disorders, including heart disease. A 2010 report published in the *Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing* stated that patients diagnosed with AF experience more psychological distress on average than do healthy controls. Unfortunately, psychological distress in forms of anxiety and depression in patients with heart failure or coronary artery disease have been found to increase the risk for mortality and complications.

Intense stress and anger can even cause heart rhythm problems to worsen. Sleep, relaxation and rest are important for healing fibrillations since they help balance hormones and control the release of cortisol, which can impair normal immune and heart functions when present in abnormally high amounts. In fact, sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea and mood-related disorders, worsened by cortisol are tied to heightened risk for AF.

Some simple ways to lower stress include: nixing caffeine, smoking and alcohol; getting proper sleep; practicing mindful techniques and/or meditating; practicing breathing techniques; journaling; doing something creative; spending time with family and pets; and using essential oils like lemon, frankincense, ginger (which double as anti-inflammatories).

### 4. Exercise

One of the best ways to fight stress is through exercise, which can be helpful for improving heart health as long as it's medically cleared first. A 2013 report published in the *Canadian Journal of Cardiology* found that short-term, ongoing exercise training of low, moderate or vigorous intensity in adults with permanent atrial fibrillation significantly improved heartbeat control, functional capacity, muscular strength and power, activities of daily living, and quality of life.

Some evidence shows that AF in athletes can be triggered by a rapid heart rate called a supraventricular tachycardia, so always get checked out if you notice changing symptoms when exercising. Make sure you implement regular exercise that you enjoy and can stick with, that includes low-impact exercises like swimming, cycling or brisk walking.

### 5. Reduce Intake of Chemicals, Toxins and Air Pollution

Heart disease and inflammation are tied to free radical damage (also called oxidative stress) and low antioxidant levels in the body. Free radicals can accumulate in the body due to a poor diet, environmental pollutants, alcohol, smoking, unhealthy fats and a lack of sleep.

Studies suggest that air pollution is related to thrombosis, inflammation and endothelial dysfunction. These cause oxidation that wreaks havoc in the body — damaging cells, breaking down tissue, mutating DNA and overloading the immune system. You can greatly lower your exposure to toxins by buying as much organically grown produce as you can, using natural beauty and household products, and reducing intake of cigarettes or recreational drugs.

### 6. Use an Over-the-Counter Anti-Inflammatory

Some supplements that can help speed up the body's ability to detox, fight inflammation and heal

itself, including:

- Omega-3 fish oil
- Curcumin and garlic supplements
- **A good CO-Enzyme Q10**
- Selenium
- Vitamins C, D and E
- 

Don't automatically supplement without getting tested properly by your holistic practitioner. Just because it is stated that you "need" a certain substance does not mean your particular body is lacking it... never assume anything when it comes to utilizing supplements. Get with your holistic doc to determine what you need.

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