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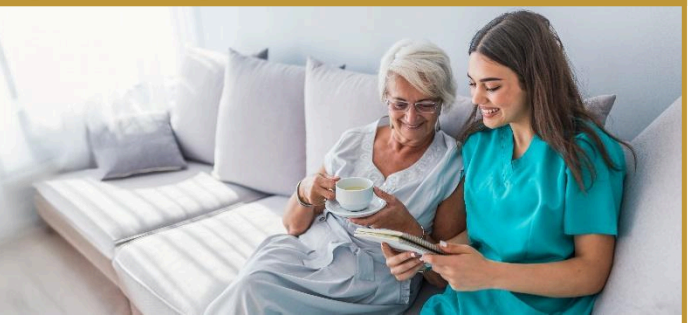


Understanding Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)

AFib is an irregular, often rapid heart rhythm (arrhythmia) caused by abnormal electrical signals in the heart. These signals make the atria (upper chambers) contract irregularly and out of sync with the ventricles (lower chambers), potentially leading to blood pooling, clots, and strokes. AFib episodes may be occasional or constant.

Causes of AFib

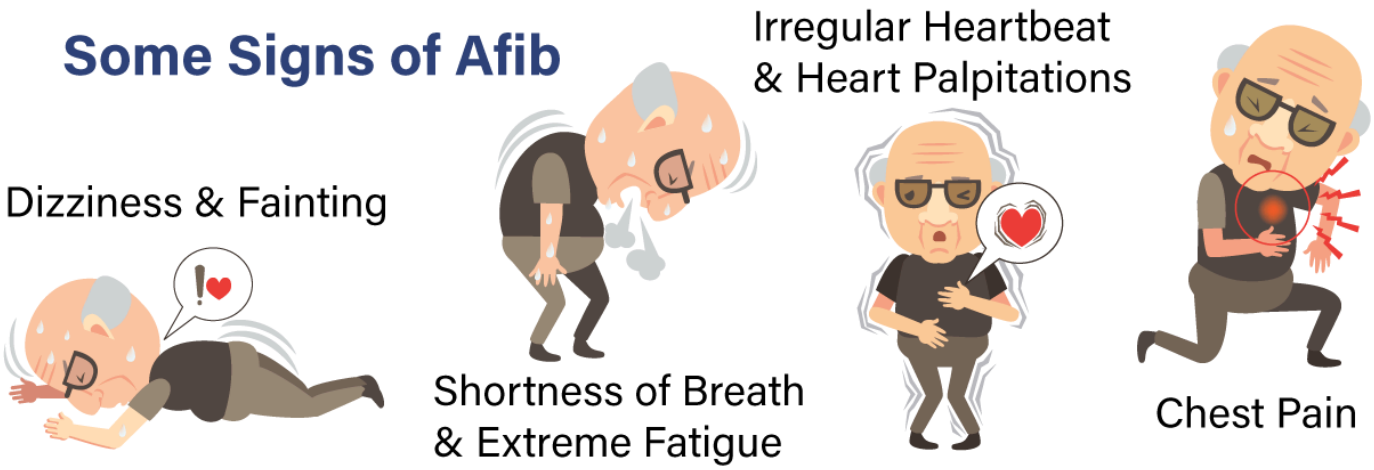
AFib typically results from changes or damage to the heart's tissue or electrical system, often due to coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, or heart failure. Other causes include valve issues, hyperthyroidism, alcohol overuse, or illness-induced stress responses. Sometimes, AFib occurs without an identifiable cause.

Symptoms

While some individuals feel no noticeable changes, others experience fatigue, breathlessness, or symptoms worsening when the ventricles beat too quickly.

Treatment Options

1. **Medications:**
    - **Beta Blockers**: Slow the heart rate, ensuring ventricles fill with blood properly. Unsuitable for patients with COPD, bradycardia, or low blood pressure.
    - **Calcium Channel Blockers**: Alternative to beta blockers, though not recommended for those with weak heart contractions or low blood pressure.
    - **Blood Thinners**: Prevent clots and reduce stroke risk but carry a bleeding risk.



2. **Lifestyle Changes:**
   - Adopt heart-healthy eating (e.g., DASH diet) to reduce blood pressure.
   - Exercise regularly—aim for 30 minutes, five days a week (consult your provider).
   - Limit alcohol and quit smoking or tobacco use.

Self-Care Tips

- Attend all appointments and follow your provider's recommendations.
- Keep an updated list of medications for emergencies.
- Discuss any new symptoms or over-the-counter medications with your doctor.

In Summary

AFib is a challenging but manageable condition. By working closely with your healthcare provider and adopting heart-healthy habits, you can reduce risks and continue living a fulfilling life. Remember, you're not alone—millions of people are navigating AFib with the support of healthcare teams and communities.

BHI At Home is here for you. Please contact our office for more information.