

Patient Information

Atrial Fibrillation

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heart rhythm that occurs when the top part of the heart (the atria) are beating at up to 300-600 beats per minute.
- Because the atria are responsible for being the “pacemaker” of the heart, they send a signal to the bottom chambers of the heart (the ventricles) indicating when to beat.
- The ventricles are responsible for pumping blood to the lungs and to the rest of the body. When the ventricles beat, this creates our pulse.
- In atrial fibrillation, the atria are beating so fast that the ventricles have trouble keeping up, thus the pulse is irregular and occasionally rapid.

SYMPTOMS

- Commonly, patients with atrial fibrillation have no symptoms.
- If a patient has symptoms the most common symptoms are
 - Rapid heart rate
 - Irregular pulse
 - Fatigue
 - Shortness of breath (especially with exertion)
- The most concerning side effect of atrial fibrillation is stroke, which can occur if the irregular heart rate causes blood to pool and clot inside the heart. When the clot dislodges from the heart it travels to the brain.

DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

- EKG
- Echocardiogram
- Arrhythmia monitor (Holter monitor)

TREATMENT

- Heart rate control (antiarrhythmic) medications
- Blood thinners to prevent strokes
- Aspirin
- Occasionally procedures such as cardioversion or ablation if appropriate

FOR MORE INFORMATION or to make an appointment at URMC Cardiology at Highland Hospital, please call (585) 341-6780 or visit us online at www.highlandheart.urmc.edu