

# Heart Failure and Atrial Fibrillation

## ***What Is Atrial Fibrillation?***

Atrial fibrillation is a very common heart problem. It is an irregular heart beat or rhythm that affects the upper two chambers of the heart. The heart is made up of four chambers. The upper two chambers of the heart are called the atria, and the lower two are called the ventricles.

This irregular heart rhythm often causes the upper chambers to beat too fast. This leaves too little time for blood to pump into the two lower chambers. As a result, the amount of blood that flows to your body is reduced.

If you have atrial fibrillation, your heart works very hard, but it still can't pump enough blood for your body's needs. You may always feel tired and particularly weak or dizzy during activity since too little blood is getting to your muscles or to your brain.

Atrial fibrillation may make you feel bad, but it is not serious. Your doctor may choose not to treat it.

## ***How Can You Control Atrial Fibrillation?***

If your doctor decides to treat your atrial fibrillation, he or she may use medication to help your heart beat slower.

On the next page is a list of three types of drugs that are used to control heart rate. Any of them can be harmful if taken incorrectly, so it is very important to take them only as directed by your doctor.

***How Can You  
Control Atrial  
Fibrillation?  
continued***

Type of Drug	Generic Name	Brand Name
Beta-Blockers	metoprolol	Lopressor
	carvedilol	Coreg
	atenolol	Tenormin
Calcium Channel Blockers	diltiazem	Cardizem Dilacor Tiazac
	verapamil	Calan Verelan Isoptin Covera
Digitalis	digoxin	Lanoxin

With atrial fibrillation, you have an increased chance of developing blood clots. These clots can then break off and cause strokes or other damaging effects.

Blood thinners may reduce the chance of stroke caused by atrial fibrillation. Warfarin (or Coumadin) is the most commonly prescribed blood thinner. But it is also very toxic when taken in the wrong dosage. Your blood level must be checked frequently by the doctor to be sure that the medicine is safe and effective for you.