

Atrial Fibrillation

Getting Ready to Learn About Atrial Fibrillation

Learning something new can be hard. It is even harder if you are not feeling well. The purpose of this education plan is for you and the staff to review this information together. Here are some good things to tell the staff:

- Who you want to learn with you. We would like to have someone who will be helping you at home learn with you.
- The best way for you to learn. Do you learn best by reading a book or pamphlet, or by doing things yourself?
- If you are not feeling well, if you are in pain or you cannot focus on learning right now.

This information is important to your health. We may explain something more than once. We will be giving you information in small bits over several days.

What I Need to Learn About Atrial Fibrillation

By the time I leave the hospital I will be able to tell the staff:

1. Symptoms of atrial fibrillation.
2. What medicines I am taking for atrial fibrillation and their side effects.
3. How to take my pulse.
4. How to take care of myself at home.
5. When I will call the doctor

The staff will use three questions to teach me about Atrial Fibrillation:

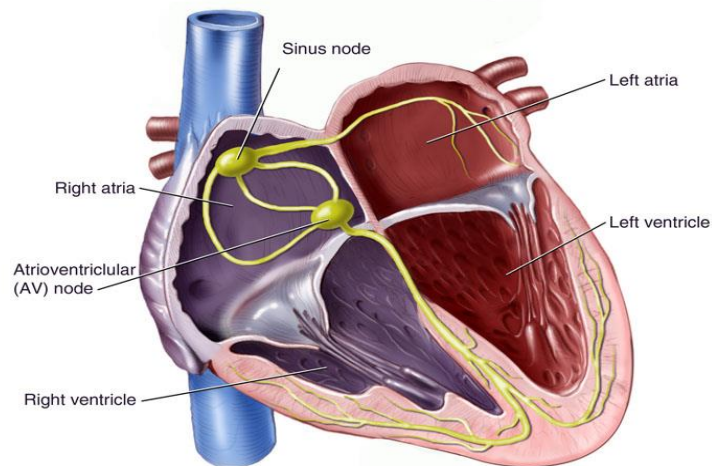
1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is this important to me?

The staff will ask me to repeat back important points in my own words, or ask me to show what I have learned. They want to make sure that I know about my disease and how to take care of myself.

What is my main problem?

- ❑ Atrial Fibrillation: I have Atrial Fibrillation (A-Fib or AF), which is an abnormal heartbeat. Normally, the heart beats in a regular and evenly spaced way. Signals to start each heartbeat begin in the right upper part of the heart (atria - shown below.) Signals then move to the lower part (ventricles.) In A-Fib, the signals are irregular and may make the heart beat fast. The heart does not pump in the best way. In A-Fib there is a higher risk for blood clots. These clots may travel to my brain, lungs or other parts of my body.

This picture shows the heart and the parts responsible for the heart beat.

Nodes Responsible for Cardiac Rhythm

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What do I need to do?

I will be able to tell the staff the symptoms of A-Fib.

- Irregular heartbeat
- Fast heartbeat
- Heartbeats that pound, flutter or race
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Feeling tired or weak
- Feeling short of breath
- Chest pain or pressure or a tight feeling in the chest

I will be able to tell the staff what medicines I am taking for a-fib and their side effects

Managing medications

- I need to take my medicines as prescribed.
- I will not change the time or amount of my medicine.
- I will not stop taking any medicines without talking to my doctor.
- I will not take cold pills with pseudoephedrine. They can cause symptoms to come back.
- I will plan ahead for getting my medicine refilled so I do not run out.

Blood Thinners

- I may be taking a blood thinner to prevent blood clots. I need to keep my appointments to have my blood checked. Checking my blood can keep my blood from getting too thin. This puts me at risk for bleeding. If my blood is not thin enough I am at risk for blood clots. I can protect my self if I:
 - Avoid cuts
 - Use an electric razor
 - Be careful when using a knife
 - Wear gloves when I garden.
 - Brush teeth gently with a soft toothbrush. Floss gently
 - Ask my doctor before I take aspirin or ibuprofen.
 - Ask my doctor about activities that have a risk of injury
 - Learn how to prevent falls at home and here in the hospital.

Medication List

- I will keep a list of all of my current medicines at home and in my wallet or purse. Include the names of the doctors who ordered each medicine.
 - Know the dose of each medicine
 - Know why I am taking each medicine.
 - Know my reactions to each medicine I am taking
 - Keep track of reactions to medicines I have taken.
 - Know the potential side effects.

I will be able to tell the staff how I will take my pulse.

- I will show the nurse how I will take my pulse by feeling for a beat inside my wrist. I will count while looking at the clock for one minute. My nurse and I will talk about what is normal for me. I will do this at home when I don't feel well.

I will be able to tell the staff how I will care for myself at home.

Diet Concerns

- I will stay at a healthy weight. I can ask my doctor or dietitian what a healthy weight is for me.
- The foods I eat can help keep my blood pressure normal.
 - I will limit the amount of sodium and salt in my diet.
 - Read food labels for sodium content. Avoid or limit foods with more than 300 mg of sodium in a serving.
 - Do not add salt to foods when I cook or when I am eating.
 - Be careful when eating at a restaurant. Choose foods that are naturally low in sodium. Many restaurants have special menu items that are prepared with little or no salt.
 - I will include foods that are rich in potassium in my diet.
 - Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables.
 - Eat low-fat or fat-free dairy foods to give me calcium and potassium.
- I will eat foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids. These foods include walnuts and other tree nuts, salmon and tuna and flaxseed oil.
- Sometimes medicine and food work together. I will ask a pharmacist if I have questions about the foods I eat and my medicine.

- If I have questions about diet, I can ask my doctor to refer me to a dietitian. I can schedule an appointment with a Bronson dietitian by calling 269-341-6860.

Limit the amount of alcohol I drink.

- Women should drink no more than one drink a day.
- Men should drink no more than two drinks a day.
- One drink is 12 ounces (oz) of beer, 5 oz of wine, or 1½ oz of liquor.

Be active with the right kind of exercise.

- My doctor will tell me what exercise is best for me. If any activity makes my symptoms worse, I should stop and call my doctor.

If I smoke, try to quit.

Heart disease or high blood pressure

- I will follow my doctor's orders for heart disease or high blood pressure.

Driving

- I will not drive until my doctor gives the okay

I will be able to tell the staff when I will call the doctor.

I will call my doctor right away if:

- My symptoms of A-Fib return.
 - Irregular heartbeat
 - Fast heartbeat (take my pulse for one minute and the pulse is over 100)
 - Heartbeats that pound, flutter or race
 - Feeling dizzy or faint
 - Feeling tired or weak
 - Feeling short of breath
 - Chest pain or a feeling of pressure in the chest
- I will call my doctor if I have bruising or bleeding that does not stop.
 - Watch for signs of bleeding

- bruises on my body that do not fade
- small cuts and nicks that will not stop bleeding
- nose bleeds
- blood in my urine or stool
- I will make sure everyone knows I am taking a blood thinner medicine. My dentist and other doctors will want to know that I am at risk for bleeding
- I will call my doctor if I have a rash or hives or think I may be allergic to the medicines.

I will call during regular office hours if:

- I have questions about my condition or how it is being treated.
- I need to make another appointment to check progress.
- I think my pills are not helping or if I feel I am reacting to the medicines.
- It's OK to ask my doctor or pharmacist if I have questions about my medicine.

Why is this important to me?

- Symptoms of atrial fibrillation (A-Fib) can come and go. My treatment needs to be watched closely.
- It is important to get treatment as soon as possible. This prevents complications like a blood clot, heart attack or heart failure.
- The goal of my treatment is to have a heart rate that is controlled and normal.

As part of my care I have received this education plan. I may also receive:

- Coumadin or Lovenox education plan.
- Information about medicines I am taking.

Atrial Fibrillation Education Plan

Resources for Staff

- [Nursing Reference Center Plus - Atrial Fibrillation](#)
- [Lexicomp- Atrial Fibrillation](#)

Teaching Tools (Items given to the patient)

- Atrial Fibrillation Education Plan
- Warfarin or Lovenox Education Plan if indicated
- [Preventing Falls at Home Education Plan](#)
- [Preventing Falls in the Hospital Education Plan](#)

References:

- Micromedex CareNotes System
- Mosby's Nursing Consult
- Nettina, S. M. (2009). Patient education guidelines: Preventing, recognizing and treating bleeding. In *Lippincott Manual of Nursing Practice* (9th ed., p. 982). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott-Raven Publishers. (accessed via Bronson Library page 5-26-2010.)

Always close each teaching session with the question, “What questions do you have for me?”

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