Treatment for AF

One way of treating AF is with a process called cardioversion. This is a safe and effective technique where doctors use electrical stimulation to convert the heart rhythm to normal. These measures are effective for many people.

When cardioversion is not appropriate, AF treatment uses either warfarin or aspirin to prevent stroke causing blood clots. The presence and type of other risk factors for stroke and heart disease will determine the type of drug recommended for you.

If your doctor prescribes warfarin you will need to be monitored to make sure the amount you are taking is right for you. If you have suffered a TIA or stroke and are in AF, warfarin provides a strong protective effect. This protective effect is generally well in excess of any risk of serious side effects. You should not stop taking your medication or change the amount you take without talking to your doctor.

Further information

For more information contact the National Stroke Foundation on **1800 787 653**

About us

The National Stroke Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that works with the public, government, health professionals, patients, carers and stroke survivors to reduce the impact of stroke on the Australian community.

Our challenge is to save 110,000 Australians from death and disability due to stroke over 10 years.

We will achieve this by:

- Educating the public about the risk factors and signs of stroke and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Working with all stakeholders to develop and implement policy on the prevention and management of stroke.
- Encouraging the development of comprehensive and coordinated services for all stroke survivors and their families.
- Encouraging and facilitating stroke research.

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strokefoundation

Stop stroke. Save lives. End suffering.

Irregular heart beat and stroke

strokesafe for life

Brought to you by the National Stroke Foundation

What is a stroke?

A stroke is not a heart attack. Also known as cerebrovascular disease, a stroke occurs when the supply of blood to the brain is suddenly disrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. Blood may stop moving through an artery because the artery is blocked by a clot or plaque, or because the artery breaks or bursts.

When blood stops flowing, the brain does not receive the oxygen it needs, and therefore brain cells in the area die and permanent damage may be done. Some strokes are fatal while others cause permanent or temporary disability. Some people are able to make a full recovery after a stroke.

Stroke is the second single greatest killer and one of the leading causes of disability amongst adults in Australia.

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) and Stroke

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) is a risk factor for stroke, however you need to be aware that it is one of many risk factors, including diabetes, high cholesterol, irregular heart beat, and other lifestyle choices.

AF is the term given to a particular type of irregular heartbeat. The heart consists of a number of different chambers which prepare blood to take oxygen and nutrients to the rest of the body before pumping it out again.

In a healthy heart, all 4 chambers beat at the same time, somewhere between 60 and 100 times per minute. If someone has an irregular heart, the left atrium of the heart beats rapidly and unpredictably and can beat irregularly at over 400 times per minute. Untreated, AF can result in a high risk of stroke.

How does AF cause stroke?

The normal rhythm of a healthy heart empties the heart's chambers of incoming blood and transports it around the body. If the heart is beating irregularly and rapidly, it doesn't propel the blood swiftly through the heart, and the blood flow can become sluggish. This can result in blood clots which break loose and travel to the brain or other parts of the body.

Once in the brain, a clot can block an artery and cause a stroke. Brain cells deprived of blood by a blocked artery can die, causing permanent disability or death.

Who has AF?

AF is common in people over the age of 65 and people who have heart disease or thyroid disorders.

How do I know I have AF?

Some people with AF will experience a "pounding" or "fluttering" heart beat, known as heart palpitations. In others, symptoms may include dizziness, faintness or light headedness. Others may experience chest pain, ranging from a mild discomfort to severe pain however AF often has no strong outside symptoms, so an electrocardiogram (ECG) is the only effective way of detection.

During an ECG, sensitive electrodes are placed on your chest. These electrodes pick up the electrical impulses generated by your body that cause your heart to beat. The impulses are then recorded on a piece of paper called an ECG strip. By examining the specific pattern of electrical impulses recorded on the ECG strip, your doctor can establish if you have AF.

You can help make Australia strokesafe

Yes, I would like to make a tax deductible gift of:

☐ $250 ☐ $150 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 Other $ _____

☐ My cheque (payable to National Stroke Foundation) is enclosed or

Please debit my:

☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ Diners

Card no: _____

Signature _____ Expiry Date _____

Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

Address _____

Suburb _____ State _____ Postcode _____

Date of Birth _____

Please forward to: National Stroke Foundation
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