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Atrial Fibrillation

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Atrial Fibrillation](#).

Atrial fibrillation (AF) describes the rapid, irregular beating of the left *atrium* (upper chamber) of the heart. These rapid contractions of the heart are weaker than normal contractions, resulting in slow flow of blood in the atrium. The blood pools and becomes sluggish and can result in the formation of blood clots. If a clot leaves the heart and travels to the brain, it can cause a stroke by blocking the flow of blood through cerebral arteries. Some people with AF have no symptoms, but others may experience a fluttering feeling in the area of the chest above the heart, chest pain, lightheadness or fainting, shortness of breath, and fatigue. AF is diagnosed by an electrocardiogram (ECG), a device that records the heart's electrical activity. Other tests are often performed to rule out contributing causes, such as high blood pressure, an overactive thyroid gland, heart failure, faulty heart valves, lung disease, and stimulant or alcohol abuse. Some people will have no identifiable cause for their AF.