



Living a Better Life with Atrial Fibrillation

While atrial fibrillation (AF) is a serious heart condition, it should not be a debilitating one. There are many ways for you to have a normal lifestyle while keeping your heart healthy. This includes a combination of medication, diet changes, and exercise. Treatment and management of AF is different for everyone.

Heart Healthy Diet

In addition to the medical care provided by your physician, watching your food consumption can also be very helpful in controlling AF. A diet consisting of heart healthy foods that are low in fat and low in salt is recommended. Eating low-fat foods helps control weight and cholesterol levels, and eating foods that are low in salt helps keep blood pressure under control. In addition, follow these healthy eating tips:

- ❖ Eat more whole grains
- ❖ Choose low fat protein sources such as fish and skinless chicken
- ❖ Eat more fruits and vegetables
- ❖ Try to avoid junk foods
- ❖ Quit smoking and drinking alcohol

Exercise

It is important to exercise regularly, but before you develop an exercise routine, you should consult your physician to determine a safe level of physical activity. Exercise is beneficial for keeping weight, stress, and anxiety under control, all of which are important parts of managing AF and living a heart healthy life. However, long term excessive endurance



exercise can cause negative structural changes to the heart, an increased risk of developing AF, increase AF symptoms and can cause musculoskeletal injuries. This is especially common in marathon, professional cycling and triathlon participants. Other factors, such as altitude and temperature at the location you exercise, may exacerbate AF symptoms as well.

If you are one of those people who enjoy extreme workouts and you have known AF, you should probably re-consider your exercise regimen.

The link between obesity and AF includes:

Obesity is an important, potentially modifiable risk factor for AF. However, obesity is associated with both physical and structural changes of the heart that ultimately can lead to AF. Obesity is associated with hypertension, sleep apnea, and insulin resistance, all of which correlate with the aforementioned cardiac abnormalities. Studies have shown that interventions to promote normal weight may reduce the population burden of AF.

Yoga and Breathing

Yoga and breathing exercises can improve several aspects of an individual's overall health, with heart health being one of the most important. Many health complications result from the constant stress people often face in their daily life. Yoga and concentrated breathing have been proven to counteract the negative effects of stress. Not only does yoga stretch your muscles and relieve muscle tension, but the up-side down and reclining poses can also slow the heart, calm the brain, and relax blood vessels.



A very simple way to relieve stress at any time is to practice concentrated breathing. Simple breathing techniques, which only need to be done for about ten minutes a day, can improve many different aspects of your health, including metabolism, digestion, quality of sleep, and energy level during the day because they help transport oxygen more efficiently through the entire body.

If you live with AF, spending just thirty minutes a day doing yoga and ten minutes a day breathing properly can improve your overall health and quality of life.

Although physical exercise is recommended for a healthy lifestyle, patients with atrial fibrillation (AF) should be careful about weight training and lifting. Intense physical training, such as weight lifting, can place a burden on your heart, which can exacerbate your AF symptoms. Individuals with AF should refrain from a weight lifting regimen that causes one to grunt and strain because it poses a greater risk. However, not all weight training is detrimental and one should try to ease into a workout and refrain from over-exerting oneself. As with any new workout plan, make sure to consult your doctor before starting a plan.

Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea is episodes of abnormal breathing patterns that deprive the body of oxygen while sleeping. Research has shown a link between sleep apnea and AF due to structural remodeling of the heart (primarily in the left atrium). It has also been shown that AF patients are more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea in comparison to those without AF. In regards to AF treatment, sleep apnea has been associated with lower success rate of atrial ablation. The current recommendation for sleep apnea is a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine that can improve sleep and overall quality of life.