

Dr. Kowey

What is the difference between arrhythmias and atrial fibrillation?

The term “arrhythmia” refers to any change in the normal sequence of electrical impulses that cause the heart to beat. The result is a heart that can beat too fast, too slow or erratically. Atrial fibrillation (or a-fib for short) is one of many forms of arrhythmia. During a-fib, the heart’s two small upper chambers (the atria) quiver instead of beating effectively. Blood isn’t pumped completely out of them, so it may pool and clot. If a piece of a blood clot in the atria leaves the heart and becomes lodged in an artery in the brain, a stroke results.

How is atrial fibrillation discovered if a patient is asymptomatic?

Some people who have atrial fibrillation (a-fib) don’t have symptoms. For these people, a-fib often is found during a physical exam or EKG (electrocardiogram) test done for another purpose. Other times, a-fib is diagnosed after a person goes to the doctor because of symptoms.

Can you exercise as usual if you have atrial fibrillation? What about the foods you eat or caffeine drinks?

Exercise is encouraged for patients with atrial fibrillation as long as the heart rate is controlled and you feel OK. Caffeine and alcohol in small to moderate amounts is unlikely to impact a-fib. Large amounts may trigger the arrhythmia in some patients. Talk to your doctor to learn more about your condition and any limitations it may cause.

What is C-reactive protein level? How important is it as a determinant of heart health?

“Inflammation” is the process by which the body responds to injury or an infection. Research studies suggest that inflammation is important in atherosclerosis – the process in which fatty deposits build up in the inner lining of arteries. C-reactive protein (CRP) is a protein found in the blood, the levels of which rise in response to inflammation. It’s been suggested that testing CRP levels in the blood may be an additional way to assess cardiovascular disease risk. A growing number of studies have found that the higher the CRP levels, the higher the risk of having a heart attack.

Is there a connection between atrial fibrillation and hiatal hernia?

People with gastrointestinal problems (such as hiatal hernia) have a marginally greater chance of having a-fib. The reason for that is not well understood, however.