

PARISH NURSE - HEALTHY NOTES:

September 2020

September is National Atrial Fibrillation (AFib) Awareness Month. AFib is the most common heart rhythm disorder. Many live with Afib and not all know they have it. Some have no symptoms and others may have mild symptoms, but are undiagnosed.

Who is at risk? People with a family history, existing heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, or chronic conditions including thyroid problems, sleep apnea, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, or lung disease.

What is AFib? It's a condition where your heart's upper chamber (Atria) beats out of sync with the lower chambers (ventricles). This creates an abnormal heartbeat that is often rapid but can also be too slow or irregular.

Symptoms that a person may experience include: irregular heartbeat, heart palpitations (skipped beats), shortness of breath, fatigue, and weakness.

There are three stages of AFib:

1. Paroxysmal AFib: you may feel your heart palpating or having the sensation of skipping a beat. Key here is to seek help early so it doesn't get worse
2. Persistent AFib: Paroxysmal AFib gets upgraded to Persistent when the symptoms last more than one week. Persons experience a racing heartbeat, dizziness, weakness and fatigue. Since the heart is "struck", doctors will have to do something to get it back to normal. a) minor electrical shock and/or b) certain IV medications
3. Chronic AFib: At this stage the AFib is irreversible. If the above treatments don't work. A procedure called a Catheter Ablation" is done. This is not a guarantee to fix the problem

AFib leaves one at an increased risk for heart failure because of the extra strain on your heart and for blood clots. Blood doesn't flow through the heart as well as it should which can lead to pooling and the formation of blood clots.

Treatment options: the goals for treatment include reducing the risk of stroke and correcting the abnormal heart rhythm. Your doctor will recommend a treatment based on factors including how long you have had AFib and the frequency of symptoms. Often, medication is the first line of treatment. Antiarrhythmic meds and blood thinners may be prescribed to reduce the risk of blood clots.

Check with your doctor, in a timely manner, if you think you may be experiencing these symptoms.