

# **Heart Arrhythmias**

## Atrial Flutter



## Atrial flutter (AFL)

This is similar to atrial fibrillation, except the heartbeats can be more regular. It is caused by abnormal electrical signals which make the upper chambers of the heart beat quickly, fluttering instead of fully contracting. This causes a fast heart beat, and does not allow the heart to pump properly. It is usually an age-related condition, but can also be caused by previous heart surgery or previous catheter ablation as a treatment for atrial fibrillation.

If not treated, it can lead to weakening of the heart muscle (cardiomyopathy) and heart failure, although this is relatively uncommon. It can also lead to blood pooling in the upper chambers of the heart, increasing the risk of clots forming. If these clots travel from the heart to the bloodstream, they can cause a stroke. So proper diagnosis and treatment is important to help prevent these complications and allow you to live a full life.

*Some people with atrial flutter do not experience any symptoms. When symptoms are present, they can include:*



- Fast, fluttering heartbeat



- Shortness of breath



- Fatigue



- Chest pain



- Lightheadedness or fainting

*Treatments can include:*



- Medicines: Anti-arrhythmic or anticoagulant medicines may be used. Anti-arrhythmic medicines help restore a normal heart rhythm, while anticoagulant medicines help to prevent blood clots, and so reduce risk of having a stroke.



- **Electrical cardioversion:** This procedure gives an electrical shock to the heart to help it get back to a normal rhythm. Electrode pads are placed on the chest, and medicine is given through a vein to put you to sleep during the procedure. The electrodes are connected to a cardioversion machine (defibrillator) via wires. This machine checks the rhythm of your heart and delivers shocks to the heart to restore a normal rhythm. Once you are asleep, the procedure usually only takes a few minutes. Risks include: developing another abnormal heart rhythm, dislodging existing blood clots, or skin damage where the electrodes are placed. These risks are uncommon, and your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of this treatment with you. For most people, the procedure quickly restores a normal heartbeat, allowing you to get back to your usual activities.




- **Catheter Ablation:** In this procedure, heat or cold energy is used to modify the tissues in the heart that create the abnormal signals. Risks of ablation can include: infection after surgery, damage to blood vessels or heart valves, a new or worsening arrhythmia, blood clots, stroke or heart attack. Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of this treatment with you. Although there are a number of possible risks, the procedure is generally considered low risk, and can be done with an overnight stay or as a day procedure.





**Hearts4heart supports, educates and advocates for Australians living with atrial fibrillation and other heart conditions. Join our community and the conversation.**

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