



## Atrial Fibrillation Information

**Before, during, or after your surgery, your healthcare team noticed you have Atrial Fibrillation (AF or A Fib). St. Paul's perioperative clinic will follow up with you in one week and a phone or in person appointment in four weeks.**

### What is atrial fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a type of irregular and often very rapid heart rhythm. During AF the upper chambers of the heart beat chaotically and irregularly – out of sync – with the lower chambers. This may cause blood to not pump efficiently. Untreated this can lead to a higher risk of stroke, blood clots or heart failure. AF might come and go, last for a few days or become permanent (more than a year).

**Symptoms of AF vary from person to person and can include:**

- Palpitations (heart racing, beating irregularly)
- Chest discomfort
- Feeling light-headed or dizzy
- Feeling anxious or sweaty
- Tiredness or feeling short of breath with very little physical effort

### Who does atrial fibrillation affect?

AF affects nearly 200,000 Canadians. In many cases, the cause of AF is unknown. This is called idiopathic atrial fibrillation.

**Common known causes of AF are:**

- High blood pressure
- Coronary artery disease
- Diseases that damage the heart valves
- Heart failure
- Diabetes
- Hyperthyroidism
- Heart surgery
- Family history of AF

### What happens next?

Depending on your symptoms and if the irregular rhythm persists, you may need more testing. This testing could include an electrical tracing of your heart - an electrocardiogram (ECG) or Holter monitor. You may also need an ultrasound of your heart, also known as an echocardiogram.

Treating AF includes heart rate and rhythm control with medication such as beta blockers and reducing your risk of stroke and blood clots with blood thinners (anticoagulants).

**In some cases medication alone is not enough and other treatments may be needed.**

**These include:**

- Cardioversion - electrical pulses are sent through paddles on the chest to the heart to jolt the heart back into normal rhythm.
- Electrophysiology Studies (EPS) and catheter ablation – Testing is used to locate the site of irregular electrical impulses in the upper chamber of the heart and tiny electrical pulses are used to destroy the cells causing the AF.
- Pacemaker insertion – The pacemaker uses electrical pulses to regulate the heart rate and rhythm.

### **When to seek medical attention**

**If you are experiencing signs of a stroke (face drooping, slurred or jumbled speech, weakness on one side of your body), or chest pain or discomfort call 911 right away.**

**For more information, please visit Health Link BC:** [www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/atrial-fibrillation](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/atrial-fibrillation)

*The information in this document is intended for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.*