# How To Explain AFib to Loved Ones

by ERIC PATTERSON

## How to Explain Your AFib

Directly, atrial fibrillation (AFib) has impacted your life since before the day of your diagnosis. It piques your anxiety as you worry what will become of your physical health. It pushes you to review what you eat, how you exercise and when you sleep. Plus, there is the growing number of appointments that require your attendance.

Indirectly, AFib impacts the lives of the people around you. The people that love you and care about you will be changed by the diagnosis as well. Their reactions will different at times, but many of the same feelings will present.

With this being true, the way you begin the conversation about AFib will play a significant role in dictating how the information is received and perceived by your loved ones. To have the best results, do your best the first time. Here's how:

### Hit the Books

Unfortunately, AFib is something that a lot of people do not know well. The diagnosis, the symptoms, and the treatment may be a complete mystery to others. The more knowledge you have, the more information you can share to alleviate the concerns of others.

What do you know about AFib? As the source of information, you need to do your homework to have information available for all questions. Don't worry. You don't have to study AFib like you are taking an exam on it. You only have to know the basics and have resources available for your loved ones.

You don't need to be overly specific or very technical. Saying "AFib is when the upper area of the heart beats out of rhythm with the lower part of the heart" can go a long way to helping people understand something they are unfamiliar with.

### Assess Your Own Feelings

When a new diagnosis comes, many people go on autopilot. It seems that they are no longer thinking about what they are doing or how they are feeling about what they are doing. They are only doing.

This autopilot is a negative way to behave because it disconnects you from yourself, the cherished people in your life, and the world around you. Thinking about yourself, your diagnosis and how you feel about your diagnosis will help you tremendously. You don't have to like AFib, but you do need to understand and accept the bearing it will have on your life.

If you know, understand, and accept your feelings towards AFib, it will be much easier to speak about it with others. If you have a great deal of uncertainty or undesirable emotions attached, others in your life will notice. This

will influence the way they see your situation to be more negative. Your goal is to deliver the information in a way that permits them to come to their own conclusions. This process is best for all involved.

*Next page: three more tips for explaining AFib to loved ones.*

**Act Early**

It's true that the tasks above will take some time, and because of this, you do not want to rush the process. Beware, though. Taking too long to have a conversation with other people in your life puts you at a distinct disadvantage. When you act early, you are afforded the luxury of controlling the information.

If loved ones find out about the diagnosis from another source they may jump to a more negative conclusion without basis to do so. Falsely, they may think that AFib means certain death and are already horrified by a life without you. Rather than being able to address a neutral audience, you will have to spend much of your time undoing what is already done.

Acting early also allows you to process your feelings with trusted people in your life. Any medical diagnosis can be an isolating and fearful experience full of highs and lows. By letting people know early, you can move through the range of feelings together instead of apart. This helps build a sense of unity.

**Stay Assertive**

Now that you see the benefits of acting early, what are you going to say? Are you going to prepare a three-hour multimedia presentation set to music, or will you toss a few pamphlets to your supports after a summer picnic? Hopefully, neither option sounds good to you.

When preparing, realize that what you say is as vital as how you say it. To get the most of your information, stay assertive. Being assertive means that you are clear, concise, concrete, and respectful in your delivery. You are interested in the facts as well as your thoughts and feelings. You do well to balance your needs with the needs of others.

An assertive way to begin the conversation about AFib may look like this: I wanted to speak with you today because I learned that I have a disease called AFib. It involves my heart not working the way it should sometimes. It is pretty scary and makes me worried, but the doctor says, with treatment, I will be okay. How do you feel about this? What questions do you have?

**Act Often**

Being assertive takes time to master and longer to perfect. The good news for you is that with AFib, you will have many opportunities to practice. Some people mistakenly end the conversation about AFib after the first one. The best way to explain a complex medical issue is by continuing the conversation over an extended period of time. Mentioning your condition once, and then never speaking of it again will not end in the desired manner.

The biggest reason to continue the conversation is that people's feelings and thoughts fluctuate over time. One day, someone will be comfortable with the situation and then completely distraught the next. This is a normal progression of accepting new information. The process cannot be completed all at once.

To continue the conversation, ask questions and listen for the answers. Along the way, consider that your audience may not always be verbal with their responses. Some people will display their concern, worry, or frustrations with their body language. Some people will even respond in confusing and unexpected ways. This is another opportunity to use the assertive communication to have a conversation.

**Conclusion**

When AFib is in your life, you need as many teammates as you can summon. Follow the steps above to ensure that the explanation of your condition is met with positivity and optimism. Bad information is irreversible at times. This method will guarantee that explaining AFib is not a problem.