Adjusting to Life After an AFib Diagnosis

by BRENDA VANTA

What Should I Keep in Mind for My Daily Activities?

Like any other heart disease, atrial fibrillation has to be managed properly with medication and a healthy lifestyle. Some day-to-day activities can be restricted, otherwise the condition may worsen. Here are a few atrial fibrillation activities tips on what you should and shouldn't do:

Should You Exercise?

Yes, your heart is a muscle and has to stay fit and healthy just like any other muscle. Moderate exercise with AFib is beneficial because it can reduce the overall risk of any heart condition. It also improves your sleep, and your mood and helps you to manage your weight better. You need to talk to a physiotherapist who will design a special program for you. You can also take a walk for 30 minutes every day, jog or swim. Make sure you warm up and cool down before/after your workout to help your heart adapt to changes. Lifting heavy weights or other strenuous exercises are not recommended. If you experience an episode of atrial fibrillation during your workout, stop immediately and see your doctor.

Is It Ok To Drink Alcohol?

It is ok to drink alcohol in moderation unless your doctor told you it may interfere with the drugs you are taking. A drink or two a few times a week is generally safe. Larger amounts, however, should be avoided due to the interaction of alcohol with your blood-thinning medications (especially warfarin). As a result, you will be at higher risk for bleeding. You should avoid drinking alcohol if you experienced an episode of atrial fibrillation shortly after you drink. You also shouldn't drink at all if you can't drink in moderation.

How About Coffee or Teas?

One to two cups of coffee or tea a day is fine. Avoid larger amounts of caffeinated beverages because caffeine raises the heart rate and blood pressure and could trigger an episode of atrial fibrillation. If you are used to drinking more coffee or tea daily, simply replace their decaf version.

Is It Okay to Smoke?

No, you should stop smoking as soon as possible. Smoking is bad for everyone, especially if you have atrial fibrillation because nicotine increases the heart rate and decreases the levels of oxygen in the blood; therefore, it will increase the risk of a new episode or the development of a heart attack or stroke.

Can You Have Sex?

AFib and sex aren't as much of a risk as you may think. If you can walk up 2 flights of stairs or walk briskly without

any symptoms, your heart is fit for sexual activity. If you have been in the hospital for a complication of your heart disease, you may need to wait a few weeks until you can have sex again. Ask your doctor this question. Again, if you experience any symptoms or a new episode, then stop.

Is It Safe to Drive or Take the Plane?

It’s fine to drive as usual unless you experience an episode of atrial fibrillation. If you feel dizzy or feel as if you are going to faint, pull the car over and don’t drive until you feel safe to do so. Also, see your doctor to check if the dizziness was caused by atrial fibrillation or something else.

The doctor will also tell you if you can take a flight, but if your condition is stable, there is no reason not to fly, generally speaking. The travel insurance may be higher but check with your provider.