How Anxiety Can Affect Your AFib

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The Link Between Atiral Fibrillation and Anxiety, and What You Can Do About It

Research suggests that people with AFib are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression than those with healthy hearts, and anxiety seems to influence the severity of AFib. In order to improve your symptoms, you need to get to the heart of the matter. Learn how to tell AFib episodes and anxiety attacks apart, and how to ease the affect anxiety has on your heart rhythm disorder.

The Difference between Panic Attacks and AFib

Atrial fibrillation and anxiety attacks share some principal symptoms, including episodes of irregular heart rhythm, and worrying about the cause can only make it worse. However, the two syndromes are actually quite different in nature. While AFib is a physical disorder involving abnormal electrical, anxiety is an emotional disorder that can be trigged by a number of reactions, situations or stimulants.

Although different people can experience symptoms differently, there are a few indicators that your chest discomfort is likely a panic attack:

- **Gradual heart rate decline**. AFib episodes typically come on suddenly and leave without notice, but heart rate tends to gradually return to normal as a panic attack ends.
- **Fast, but regular heartbeat.** A panic attack provokes a constant rapid heart rate. In contrast, AFib typically causes an erratic heart rate, where the beats speed up for a few seconds, then slow, then speed up again.
- **Emotional component.** During panic attacks, it can feel like the world is about to end – fear, helplessness and a sense of impending doom are commonly reported. AFib, on the other hand, is a strictly physical occurrence that generally doesn't bring emotional upset.

Both conditions call for closer investigation, so it's important to see a doctor if you have chest pain or are worried about an irregular heartbeat. If you find that you're having more AFib episodes, more anxiety attacks, or are aware of changing heart rate patterns, you may need to examine the stressors in your daily life.

Relieving Anxiety to Reduce AFib Symptoms

Anxiety can interfere with heart rate, and that can make AFib episodes more scary and uncomfortable, which will certainly cause more anxiety. If anxiety is a known trigger for your AFib, you need to deal with it in order to end the vicious cycle. It's crucial that you reduce the stress in your life, treat your anxiety disorder, and create a heart-healthy environment to ease the effects of both conditions.

- **Medications**. Make sure you consult with your doctor about taking appropriate anxiety medication. Even if you don't take it daily, you should have something on hand to quell the problem as soon as it begins.
- **Exercise.** It should come as no surprise that exercise is an invaluable asset in the fight against anxiety.

Regular activity is one of the best ways to relieve stress, plus it helps many patients with AFib reduce the frequency of irregular heart rate episodes.

- **Relaxation therapy.** Learning how to systematically relax your body and mind will go far to helping you gain control over anxious episodes.
- **Communication**. Meet with a support group or online forum to share your ideas and concerns, and keep the lines of communication open with your doctor. No problem is too small to mention – be open, honest and inquisitive.

AFib and anxiety are uncomfortable, worrisome and disruptive, but they don't have to control your life. Talk to your doctor about some changes you can make to strengthen your emotional and physical health to diminish your symptoms today, and improve your life in the years to come.