What AFib Patients Should Know About Dizziness and Fainting

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Dealing With Dizziness and Fainting and When to See a Doctor

Afib is never a comfortable condition, but there are times when it becomes frightening, debilitating and even dangerous. While dizziness and fainting are relatively common complaints and generally won't cause any damage, these symptoms could also point to more serious complications. Fortunately, the right reaction to a dizzy spell or fainting episode can save your body from injury, and quite possibly prevent permanent damage that may result from a more serious underlying condition.

How AFib Can Lead to Fainting

Irregular heart rhythms commonly cause dizziness and fainting, and the problem is with the movement of blood. During Afib, the atrioventricular node is overwhelmed by all the irregular electrical impulses in the heart, causing your heartbeat to become rapid and irregular, and that malfunction prevents your heart from efficiently pumping the blood out to the body. In turn, less oxygenated blood is reaching the brain with each pump of the heart, and that lack of oxygen often leads to dizziness, and could result in fainting.

Protecting Against Light-Headedness and Fainting

You may not be able to avoid the lightheaded feeling that comes with AFib episodes, but you can protect your body against any damaging consequences of fainting. When you feel a dizzy spell coming on, there are a few steps you can take to weather the discomfort:

- **Sit down**. Wherever you happen to be, stop moving and sit down until the dizziness passes. If you're driving at the time, pull over immediately and put your hazard lights on, so you can safely wait out the episode. Relax your muscles. The less you move your body, the easier blood can move to your brain.
- **Tell someone**. If you're in a public space, let someone know that you're dizzy, so they can help you stay upright or prevent a fall. Try not to be embarrassed about it – the most important thing it to protect your body, and your coworkers, friends, family, even strangers, will surely be happy to help you. If possible, respond to their questions with nods or head-shakes to let them know what you need from them.
- **Breathe deeply**. Close your eyes, and take in deep, slow breaths to restore oxygen levels in your brain. If you're close to a window, move to it slowly, and breathe in some fresh air. Slow, rhythmic breathing will also help to ward off panic, and protect against hyperventilation.

If you do faint, take it easy when you regain consciousness: sit up slowly, breathe deeply and stay seated for a few minutes before trying to stand. Many people find taking small sips of water helps with the cold sweats, nausea and tremors that can come with dizzy episodes.

When Fainting Becomes an Emergency

It's vital that you tell your doctor about all your AFib symptoms, especially if you notice a change in severity or

frequency. Since AFib increases your chances of suffering a stroke, a peculiar fainting spell (blackout) or sudden, severe dizziness could be cause for concern, and should be treated seriously.

AFib can be scary, but it is also very often manageable with the right medication, lifestyle changes, and in some cases, surgical procedures. The key to successful treatment is swift action, since intermittent AFib (known as paroxysmal AFib) could become more constant, or even lead to heart failure without the right attention. In the end, it is always better to be safe than sorry, so create a specific action plan with the help of your doctor, which will remind you when and how to respond to an AFib episode.