Keep Your Heart Healthy During Flu Season

by BRENDA VANTA

AFib and Avoiding the Flu

It's flu season and you want to keep your heart healthy and symptom free. What can you do to avoid respiratory infections? Avoid the triggers of AFib, and have a cold and flu prevention plan. Consider the following tips:

1. **Avoid physical stress.** If your body is not working optimally, the physical stress can lead to abnormal rhythm problems and trigger an AFib episode. Gen enough sleep, eat healthy diet – a good choice heart healthy menu would be the Mediterranean diet, based on fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and fish, whole grains, healthy oils (i.e. olive oil), and nuts and seeds.
2. **Avoid coffee, caffeine based beverage and alcohol.** Many AFib patients are fine, and the symptoms are stable is they drink alcohol or coffee occasionally, in moderation – for some it can be a problem. One study featured in the "American Journal of Cardiology" explains the link between alcohol ingestion and vigil tone (the level of activity of the vagus nerve, a major nerve found in the neck area). AFib sufferers are more likely to have an increased vagal tone and experience an AFib episode when drinking alcohol, reports this study. The studies about coffee as an AFib trigger are mixed, so learn to listen to your body – if it bothers you and you experience symptoms; you should not drink coffee at all.
3. **Keep your body well hydrated.** Your body needs enough water at all times and a change in your hydration levels can affect your heart function. Drink plenty of water throughout the day, especially when you work out or feel tired. Avoid salty foods as they can cause dehydration.

4. **Stay active.** Incorporating exercise in your life is beneficial to better cope with AFib, indicates a 2008 study published in the journal "Circulation". In rare cases it may bring an AFib episode, however. Talk to a fitness expert or a physiotherapist who can recommend an individualized routine. Exercise also boosts your immune system and your body will be better equipped to defend against colds, flus, and related illnesses.
5. **Reduce stress.** Like physical stress, emotional stress can also make your more likely to catch a cold or flu, or trigger heart symptoms. Not just anxiety or panic attacks, but also feeling chronic stress can make your heart beat irregularly. Try some deep breathing techniques, or hypnosis. Yoga and tai chi can help you decrease both your physical and emotional stress in check.
6. **Research.** Be very careful with the over the counter supplements you want to take for colds and flu. You may go to a pharmacy or health store and buy some remedies to have at home, just in case you need them. Don't do this. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist and have a cold and flu prevention plan. Acetaminophen and ibuprofen can increase your blood pressure and therefore the risk of heart attacks and stroke. Cough and cold remedies can also raise the blood pressure and interfere with AFib medications and potentially trigger an AFib episode. Antibiotics (especially azithromycin and other drugs in the same family of macrolide antibiotics) can cause changes in the electrical system of the heart and cause rhythm disturbances. Some herbs also have stimulant qualities and can interfere with the prescription drugs as well.