What is Holiday Heart Syndrome?

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Taking Care of Yourself Through The Holidays with AFib

There are many things a person with a heart condition should do to maintain good health when the holidays come around. One such thing is what is called “holiday heart syndrome.” This condition is very common during the holiday season where people show up in emergency rooms with symptoms of atrial fibrillation (AFib). This can be frightening for many people. It presents itself with an irregular heart rhythm or quivering of the heart. AFib causes people to have heart palpitations as well as shortness of breath, dizziness, and chest pain. A type of AFib event called *holiday heart syndrome* can happen in healthy people where they have a racing heart with an irregular beat, and it can be indicative a person having new-onset AFib.

Holiday Heart Syndrome

Holiday heart syndrome can strike anyone who has overdone it with alcohol and rich foods that they don’t consume regularly. It depends on the person and susceptibility of him/her to getting this condition. Alcohol is thought to have an effect on weakening the heart muscle. The increasing pressure in the heart causes its chambers to stretch, thus an AFib event can come about. Alcohol is the main culprit in this syndrome, so it is important not to overdo it, especially if you are ordinarily a light drinker. In combination with alcohol, having our entire routine upset with the holidays does not help. Eating poorly, not getting enough sleep, having a high caffeine intake, and increased activity that we are not used to can trigger AFib. Christmas Day and the day after the holiday are considered the worst days in terms of heart attacks.

How to Avoid AFib Episodes This Holiday

Whether you have a diagnosis for AFib or as far as you know, you are healthy, you should follow these guidelines around each holiday you celebrate:

- **Watch what you eat.** It is o.k. to eat some goodies during the Christmas holiday, but don’t eat the whole cookie platter. You should still maintain your normal diet of low-fat, low-sodium eating if you have AFib.
- **Regular exercise.** You may not feel there is any time for exercise but you should try to squeeze in 20-30 minutes of activity per day. This can be working out on the Wii Fit or walking in place while you are making dinner. Anything that you can do to squeeze in exercise will help ensure your heart stays in tip-top shape.
- **Get enough rest.** Ensure you sleep well and get a nap in if needed. This will help reduce stress levels, so your heart is not strained.
- **Keep yourself hydrated.** This is important so that your blood does not have the tendency to clot.
- **Everything in moderation.** You can have an occasional treat. Alcohol should be at a minimum; one drink for ladies and two for the men.

If at any time you feel palpitations, shortness of breath, and/or chest pain, seek medical attention immediately.