How Cold Weather Can Affect AFib Patients

by BRENDA VANTA

Staying Healthy in the Winter with AFib

If you suffer from AFib, you've probably heard that symptoms may aggravate during the cold weather, or a flare up is more likely to occur. This is true, as studies confirm that the risk is higher to be admitted to the hospital and even die with atrial fibrillation during the winter months; these risks are even higher if you are over 75. Let’s understand what happens to your heart when you are exposed to cold weather and what can you do to prevent problems, so you can enjoy the holiday season with your loved ones.

The Heart and Cold Weather

Maybe you enjoyed winter sports or simply spending time outdoors in the winter. However, if you have AFib you should stay as much as you can indoors, and keep the environment warm. When it’s cold outside, there is a risk of hypothermia (when the body temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit), because your body doesn’t produce enough energy to keep the internal temperature warm enough. Hypothermia is associated with symptoms like mental confusion, slow reactions, shivering, sleepiness, lack of coordinated movements, and in severe cases can lead to heart failure and death .The risk of hypothermia is higher in children, older people and those who have heart conditions. Note that not only cold weather can lower your body temperature trigger hypothermia, but also high winds, humidity, snow or rain.

How can you protect yourself from cold weather? Send more time indoors, and have your place well heated. Have layers of clothes, rather than single heavy clothes because those layers of clothing can trap the air and maintain a warmer temperature for your body. Keep your extremities warm by wearing a hat and scarf, gloves, socks and winter shoes.

Most people would have some extra drinks during the holidays, but you have to be careful and avoid alcoholic beverages, especially before going outside. Alcohol may give you the sensation of warmth because it dilates the blood vessels in the skin; however the heat that is generated in the skin is actually taken away from heart and other vital organs.

Eating a balanced diet, having a fitness routine and getting enough sleep are all important to keeping your immune system strong, and therefore avoiding fatigue, or colds and flu (which are all risk factors for a new episode of AFib). Make sure you drink enough water during the winter too (even if you don’t feel thirsty at times), because dehydration had been linked with AFib flare-ups. Remember that salty foods and alcohol will make your body more dehydrated.

There is another reason why you should avoid colds and flu- cold medication and nasal spray decongestants (as well as other drugs) can aggravate your heart symptoms. Before taking any new over the counter drug (conventional or natural supplement), makes sure you talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Monitor your stress levels, as emotional stress should be avoided as much as possible. Plan in advance and

organize well your holidays. Spend time with family members and friends you really enjoy and make you feel happy, so you can fully experience the perfect holidays.