How You Can Benefit From Keeping a Journal

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How to Keep an AFib Journal

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a medical condition marked by the upper chambers of the heart beating irregularly and out of sync with the lower two chambers of the heart. Someone with the condition may notice weakness and shortness of breath during an attack. Over time, AFib can lead to a list of unwanted consequences like stroke, heart failure, and other cardiac problems.

Journaling is the act of expressing and documenting your thoughts, feelings and behaviors with the hopes that these actions will improve your overall well-being. Journaling is frequently done by writing words on a blank page; however, the process is quite flexible, allowing for endless varieties like drawing, poetry and prose on paper, a computer, or anything in between.

At first look, it might seem like AFib and journaling are worlds apart. One is a serious medical condition, and the other is a way to document issues from the day. What could one have to do with the other?

As it turns out, AFib and journaling are quite compatible with one another as journaling can aid in the treatment of AFib in multiple ways.

Data Collection

The initial way journaling will target your AFib symptoms is through data collection. AFib symptoms have many triggers, and these triggers will vary from person to person.

In some cases, doctors will have a clear understanding of your condition. In other cases, the signals may not be very clear.

This is where journaling comes in. By tracking your AFib symptoms in relation to aspects of your life, you can begin to accumulate information you or your medical provider can use to better understand and treat your condition. When tracking, consider these items:

Sleep

The quality and quantity of sleep you received the night before can have a drastic impact on your symptoms the following day. Track total hours slept, any breaks in sleep, and a quality of sleep throughout the night.

Energy

How were you feeling before, during and after your AFib symptoms? You might be surprised to learn that changes in energy levels will be related to your symptoms.

Caffeine

Do you notice your AFib symptoms increasing as your consume more caffeine?

It is no surprise that caffeine and other stimulant substances like nicotine and sugar can impact your heart function. Write down the stimulants you consume and their relation to your symptoms.

Alcohol

Stimulants speed up your heart, and depressants (like alcohol) slow it down. There will be individual differences here because some might find a drink or two reduces symptoms, while others will experience the opposite effect.

Be sure to check with your doctor regarding the amount of alcohol you should be consuming, especially if you are taking multiple medications.

Food and Drink

Like with caffeine and alcohol, writing down your food intake might unveil unexpected connections to AFib. Better quality diets based on lean meats and fresh vegetables could lead to lower symptoms.

Situations

Certain people, places and situations can all be connected to your AFib symptoms without your knowledge. Writing down where you go and what you do can provide information about when symptoms are worse, and more importantly, when symptoms are better.

Time of Day

When do your symptoms occur? Does morning seem to be the problematic time of time or is nighttime worse? Documenting the time of attacks can indicate some associations.

It is important to note that during the data collection phase, your focus should be gathering information only. At this point, there is no need to analyze or interpret the results. In fact, as the individual with AFib, interpreting the data can be a challenging experience.

Instead, present your findings to your doctor, family and friends to elicit their feedback. Their objectivity may find connections you could never discover.

With the information assembled, you can make changes in attempts to reduce your symptoms.

Stress Reduction

While you are collecting, tracking and documenting information about your AFib symptoms, you might benefit from briefly jotting down your experiences from the day. You can write down what happened, what you wish would have happened, and what you can do differently tomorrow.

This information will likely not provide medical professionals with useful information, but it could help you reduce your stress levels and therefore reduce symptoms.

Stress reduction is really at the core of all journaling endeavors. By writing down your thoughts, feelings, actions and wishes for the future, you accomplish stress reduction in multiple dimensions including:

- **Processing events of the day.** Writing things down helps you gain a deeper understanding of what happened that day, which helps connect the dots between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- **Learning coping skills.** As you gather information, you can begin experimenting with coping skills and

strategies to lower stress when it is high, or maintain its level while it is low.
- **Planning for tomorrow.** While summarizing today, think about how tomorrow can be better and more fulfilling.
- **Build effective communication skills.** Even if you do not realize it, you are building more effective communication skills as you write, type or sketch in your journal. This practice helps you to identify your feelings so they can be expressed to others later.

The main benefit of stress reduction is related to its AFib link. There is some evidence to support that lower stress leads to lower intensity and frequency of AFib flares.

AFib and journaling may seem like unrelated entities, but they are interconnected in profound ways. Using journaling as a means of data collection and stress reduction can improve your AFib symptoms and treatment. What will you journal today?