Minimizing the Risk of Blood Clots with AFib

by BRENDA VANTA

The Connection Between AFib and Blood Clots

We all know that blood clots are dangerous – they can cause breathing problems, impair blood flow and increase the risk of stroke. AFib increases your risk of developing blood clots, and individuals with this condition are nearly five times more likely to have a stroke, compared to people without AFib.

But why does AFib increase the risks of blood clots, and what can you do to prevent these complications? Let's investigate.

When your heart functions properly, it moves blood into the atria (the upper chambers) and then into the ventricles (the lower chambers of the heart). From here, the blood is directed throughout the body, and then it goes back to the heart. In a person with AFib, the electrical impulses are abnormal, and therefore the atria beat chaotically, irregularly, affecting the blood flow.

As a result, there is a risk of blood clot formation. If the blood clot travels to the brain and impairs the blood flow there, a stroke can develop, killing brain cells, and potentially causing death.

Blood clots don't always cause symptoms. Sometimes a person would experience typical symptoms of A fib such as breathing difficulties , chest pain, dizziness, palpitations and fatigue .

Preventing Blood Clots

Your doctor will take care of preventing blood clots with medication. Other procedures such as catheter ablation or electrical cardioversion may also be recommended.

Talk to a dietitian to get the right diet. Your diet it is very important to keep your heart healthy and your blood pressure normal, thus preventing strokes. The diet should be low in sodium, with your daily intake below 1,500mgs, and low in saturated and unhealthy fats – replace high fat processed meats with lean meats and fish, consume low fat yogurt or cheese.

Focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and beans. Choose healthy sugars from fruits rather than cookies and other baked goods. While you have to keep your sodium intake low, potassium levels should be up – low potassium levels have been linked with various heart problems and some heart medication do deplete your potassium levels in the body. Foods like avocados, banana, and sweet potatoes are great sources of potassium. Other vitamins and minerals found in in fruits and vegetables are also influencing your blood's natural clotting abilities.

People who take blood thinning medication should also monitor their vitamin K levels. Taking drugs like warfarin and eating vitamin K rich foods (green leafy veggies, broccoli, Brussel sprouts , liver, eggs) can cause clotting factor levels to fluctuate. You don't have to avoid all these foods, but keep track of your vitamin K intake.

Two diets had been found particularly healthy for your heart, preventing the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke: the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet and the Mediterranean diet, however, a dietitian may recommend an individualized dietary plan just for you.

A 2013 study involving more than 30,000 people supports the recommendations of the American' s Heart Association that you can prevent lethal blood clots with seven easy steps:

- Be physically active
- Avoid smoking
- Eat a healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Control your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.