Has AFib Left You Feeling Exhausted?

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The Link Between AFib and Lack of Energy

AFib can cause a number of uncomfortable symptoms, or it can be virtually undetectable in your everyday life. But while this heart disorder is known to affect people differently, frequent and noticeable lack of energy is a very common complaint.

Unfortunately, the nature of the disease sets the stage for exhaustion, but the amount of fatigue you feel can rest on the frequency of your AFib episodes, how you carry out your everyday routine, and the habits and hobbies you choose.

Once you understand how your AFib may be sapping your energy, learn what you can do to counteract the exhausting effects of an irregular heartbeat.

How AFib Saps Energy

Simply put, your heart works overtime during an AFib episode, and overworked muscles lead to fatigue. However, the specific mechanisms at play can explain the muscle strain more accurately, so you can turn your attention to the root cause of your energy trouble:

Rapid Heart Rate

Although you may not feel it, your heart is under a lot of stress during an AFib episode. While healthy atria contract between 60 and 80 times a minute, AFib forces these chambers to quiver up to 400 times each minute.

The AV node tries to regulate this overexertion, but it can’t stop all the extra electrical impulses from reaching the ventricles. In turn, the ventricle beats too often, and the heart behaves as if you’re running a marathon. Not surprisingly, breathlessness and fatigue will follow.

Poor Blood Movement

Healthy atria contract regularly and efficiently: with one big push, each atrium moves the blood into the ventricles, and from there is gets pumped through the rest of the body. During AFib, the atrial chambers flutter instead of contract completely, and that means not all of the blood makes it into the ventricles at once.

Since blood carries oxygen to energize your tissues, your muscles and organs can run out of fuel when it doesn’t move through your heart the way it is supposed to.

Underlying Conditions

In many cases, AFib is brought on by another chronic condition that may have caused damage, or gone untreated

for a long time. Although the biggest risk factors seem to be advanced age, high blood pressure, and heart disease, other health issues can sap your energy and trigger AFib at the same time.

COPD, alcohol abuse, sleep apnea, asthma, and thyroid disorders can all lead to heart rhythm disorders, and since they also cause fatigue and malaise, patients may experience a double dose of exhaustion.

Next page: lifestyle changes to restore your energy.

Lifestyle Changes to Restore Your Energy

Although AFib is a chronic condition that can be dangerous, it's also manageable, and part of a good symptoms management plan is changing your lifestyle to work with your physical limitations. By modifying your perspective and your approach to certain tasks, you can conserve energy to get through your day more comfortably:

Work in Intervals

Small bursts will help you stretch out your energy stores and keep up your stamina, and that goes for everything from daily chores to exercise. When it comes to exercise (the best natural way to slow down your resting heartrate and decrease your blood pressure), this means alternating a few minutes of hard effort with almost an equal amount of rest, so you can get the aerobic benefit without aggravating your AFib.

As for your daily errands, household tasks, and other routine activities, try to space things out over the course of the late morning and afternoon – when your energy levels are naturally at their highest.

Add Magnesium

AFib patients are frequently found to have low levels of magnesium, which could be a cause for their fatigue. Magnesium is crucial for cellular function, including heart tissue cells, and at least 80% of Americans are deficient in this vital mineral.

If you've noticed more frequent AFib attacks, along with irritability, muscle spasms, insomnia and fatigue, get your magnesium levels checked out. You can tweak your diet to allow for more magnesium, but supplements are likely the easiest and quickest way to top up your magnesium levels, and your energy stores.

Check Your Symptom and Treatment Regimen

It's important to make some lifestyle changes to handle symptoms, but another other option is to go right to the source. If there are triggers or conditions that are bringing on your AFib (which is, in turn, draining your energy), learn how to neutralize those symptoms and effects to stay in control of your heart health and energy levels:

Evaluate Your Morning Routine

When AFib triggers start early in your day, there are more hours ahead for palpitations to begin, and that means a greater risk for fatigue to interrupt your schedule.

Sometimes you can decrease your chances of experiencing an AFib episode simply by cutting out your morning coffee (caffeine is a top trigger for many AFib sufferers), or starting your day off with a focus on stress relief and calming visualization.

Change up Your AFib Treatment

If you're taking medication to manage your AFib, you may need to consult your doctor to revisit your dosage, or consider other available options. Certain drugs used to control heart rhythm can bring on remarkable fatigue: Tikosyn, Rythmol, Cordarone and Pacerone are good examples.

If medication isn’t working as well as your doctor had hoped, you might consider surgery (like catheter ablation or the surgical maze procedure) to reduce your AFib risks and discomforts.

If your exhaustion is interfering with your comfort and independence, it’s time to talk to your doctor. Fatigue is a broad symptom, and it’s also a marker for a host of conditions and complications, so don’t just ignore it. You have a good deal of control when it comes to your vitality and drive, although it may take some time to find the right formula for a more energetic lifestyle.