Staying Hydrated to Avoid Triggering an AFib Episode

by BRENDA VANTA

Can Dehydration Be an AFib Trigger?

When you have atrial fibrillation, it's important to drink enough water; dehydration and AFib are connected as dehydration can potentially trigger an AFib episode. Usually dehydration on its own won't cause the episode, but when combined with other well known triggers it will.

Hydration affects the function of your heart. Your body (including the heart tissue) contains significant amounts of water, and when you are dehydrated, your body's electrolytes (the minerals in your blood such as potassium) become depleted. This can lead to abnormal heart rhythm.

Common Causes of Dehydration

We tend to associated dehydration with hot weather or exercise, but this issue can happen in other circumstances, too. For example, if you are sick and develop vomiting, diarrhea, or a fever you will also loose fluids and are likely to become dehydrated. Additionally, if you drink too much coffee or alcohol your body will become depleted of water.

Do you travel by plane often? Flying dehydrates you because the humidity level on a plane is usually less than 10%. Travel also can increase your stress level and influence your sleep, which can further increase the chances of experiencing heart symptoms.

Cold weather can also dehydrate you. When it's cold, the body's priority is to maintain its core temperature, and will work less to keep optimal fluid balance. And since you don't feel thirsty when it's cold, you often don't think about drinking extra water.

As you can see, some common AFib triggers (i.e. excessive coffee, alcohol and dehydration and the cold) can easily occur together – for example, during the holiday season – and make you more likely to experience an episode of AFib.

Preventing Deyhdration

1. **Pay attention to the signs of dehydration.** Feeling thirsty is not the only sign of dehydration. Your body may misinterpret the need for water with the need of food, and you may feel hungry (when in fact you just need more water). Other signs of dehydration include dry, sticky mouth, constipation, dark urine, feeling tired and sleepy, low urine output, dry skin, headaches, and dizziness or lightheadedness.
2. **Drink more water in special circumstances.** Drinking plenty or water is obviously the easiest way to avoid dehydration. If you feel thirsty, drink more water. If the weather is too hot or too cold, or if you are traveling by plane, make sure you have a few extra glasses of water. If you drink coffee or alcohol, have a glass or two of water with these beverages. If you are sick, consume more water (even more if you experience fever, diarrhea or vomiting). When you exercise, make sure you have a bottle of water with

you. If you eat salty food, you will need more water.

3. **Check how well hydrated you are with the urine test.** Do you need to drink two liters of water every day? Each body has individual needs for water intake. The best way is to check if you're drinking enough is to look at the color of your urine when you go to the washroom. If your urine is clear white or light yellow, you are well hydrated. If is darker, you need to drink more water.