Dealing with AFib and Anger

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The Link Between AFib and Anger

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a big problem. The condition that shifts your heart from steady, regular rhythms to rapid, uncoordinated spasms is becoming more well-known and more prevalent. Reports estimate that there are 150,000 new cases of (AFib) diagnosed each year.

This number results in almost 500,000 hospital admissions and ten times more doctors office visits. In addition, $6.5 billion in hospital costs are associated with the disease per year.

AFib is a big problem, but you are not ready for it to be your problem. You talk to your doctor, who tells you about risk factors associated with AFib including high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes and obesity. He tells you the standard information about quitting smoking, watching what you eat and increasing your exercise as he hands you a lab slip to check your thyroid and blood sugar.

Before you leave, though, he tells you one more thing: reduce your anger. Anger? What could getting angry possibly have to do with AFib? As it turns out, feelings of anger and hostility are behavioral factors related to AFib. This means the more anger you have in your life, the higher your risk is for AFib.

The theory is that anger, especially in high levels, releases stress hormones. These hormones can do damage like adding fatty substances to your heart. If you are a woman, congratulations. The link between anger and AFib only applies to men – but reducing your anger is always a worthwhile goal.

Know Your Anger

Anger is a reaction to an unwanted/undesirable event that creates changes in your thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It is often immediate and ranges from mild annoyance to fury and rage. Rage is the most extreme form of anger and is difficult to manage because it often takes over your body as well as your mind. Hostility is another aspect of anger. Someone who is hostile has an attitude towards others or the world that breeds anger; it's essentially an angry version of pessimism.

In some people, especially men, anger is often a byproduct of depression. Despite progress towards widespread acceptance of mental health issues, it is still considered feminine by some to express thoughts and feelings of depression. Because of this, men will often channel feelings of sadness, low self-esteem, hopelessness and guilt into anger. Anger is much more socially accepted and expected in men, so they feel freer to express this feeling.

Positives and Negatives of Anger

When people think about anger, they think of violence and aggression. They think that anger is the problem. Actually, the problems anger creates are usually a result of poor coping skills. Problems of anger include limiting your ability to thinking clearly and use good judgment, increasing your physical tension, hurting yourself or others

physically or psychologically and a lack of social awareness, making you more self-centered.

To limit your risk of AFib, you must begin to rethink the way your view anger. Anger is considered by many to be a negative emotion, but like any other feeling anger is neither good nor bad. What is important is what you choose to do with it. At times, it is very appropriate to become angry, and there are actually several positive aspects of anger, including:

- Anger alerts you to a problem that needs addressed.
- Anger tells other people that you are feeling upset.
- Anger gives you increased energy to act.
- Anger lets you know a conflict needs to be addressed.

Next page: feeling your anger and letting it out.

Feel the Anger

Bottling up the anger is never appropriate. Follow these tips to effectively express anger and feel better. Here's how:

- **Accept and acknowledge.** Admitting to yourself that you have the right to be angry is the first step. Getting angry is a natural as breathing or walking. Think about people or situations from your past that triggered an anger response or ones that should have.
- **Know your anger pattern.** People handle anger in very different ways. Knowing your tendencies makes you better able to express your feelings in more deliberate ways. Some people collect angry feelings slowly, over time. When they reach their breaking point, the anger is slow to come out. Others can be set off by relatively small events and stay angry for days or weeks. Knowing your anger history will help you in the present and future.
- **Track your anger.** At various times of the day, check in with yourself. Ask yourself how you are feeling and what thoughts are going through your mind. Think of anger being on a dimmer rather than a switch. It can operate at various levels Begin to expand your emotional vocabulary to include feelings of anger, rage, fury, annoyance and frustration. After you identify the feeling, list what specifics triggered that feeling.
- **Engage supports.** Some people have lived many years with suppressed or repressed feelings of anger. The notion of "uncorking the bottle" can be confusing and challenging. Do not regard this as something you must do alone. Supports may be better at identifying your anger than you are. Ask for signs that you are unaware of.

Let it Out

Often, the act of acknowledging your level of anger helps to decrease it. Other times, people find good benefit from writing about their anger in a journal or speaking with a therapist about it and the possible depression that underlines it. You may want to try another set of options, though. Want to get out anger and frustration before it sparks problems with your heart? Here's how:

- **Yell –** Yelling at people is usually not productive. People's feelings get hurt and you say things that you do not mean. So, yell at the wall or into a pillow. Say everything and anything you need or want to say. Hearing the words come out of your mouth provides a sense of relief. After you complete the yelling, think about what it is you really want to say to someone in your life and more appropriate ways to communicate it.

- **Break –** Waiting until you are fuming to find something to break is not a great idea. Instead, pay a visit to the local thrift shop or yard sale to find unwanted dishes, records, vases or anything else that looks like fun to break. Store them, and when you feel anger building, seek them out. Of course, safety is important. Think about wearing safety glasses and gloves. Break the items in a spot where there is no risk of injury to

others. The sensation of breaking something can be quite rewarding.

- **Hit –** Designate what is “hittable” in your home. Maybe an investment in a punching bag or taking boxing classes is beneficial for you. Balloons are great options as they are readily available and clean up easily. Many times, anger comes from feeling powerless or helpless. Hitting something can inspire a feeling of empowerment that you can use to achieve your goals.
- **Throw –** This is another fantastic way to divert anger desirably. Throwing a ball against a wall or a chunk of clay against the floor provides relief by releasing energy and stimulating your senses of touch, sight and sound. Pick up that clay and throw it down harder.

Conclusion

When it comes to AFib prevention, your options are limited. You know that changing your habits can make an improvement so check in with your anger habits. Accept the pros and cons of anger, feel the anger to stop the pattern of suppression and avoidance and let it out. You get to yell, break and throw things. Who knew preventing AFib could be this fun?