What You Need to Know About Weakness With AFib

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Causes of Weakness and Atrial Fibrillation

If you have a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation and you develop weakness, it is important that you take note of other symptoms and notify your doctor. The weakness which you experience may be related to atrial fibrillation, or it may be entirely due to another cause. For example, if you have the flu and feel weak, it is likely that your weakness is unrelated to atrial fibrillation. The cause of weakness associated with atrial fibrillation is not always discovered. Sometimes weakness resolves on its own. However, several conditions may cause weakness if you have atrial fibrillation.

Two types of Weakness

If you experience weakness, be sure to give your health care provider a clear description of what is occurring. Weakness can mean that you are experiencing a general feeling of fatigue. You may feel exceptionally tired.

The other type of weakness is a localized decrease in strength. For example, your right arm may feel weak after bowling. Often, both types of weakness occur simultaneously. It is important that you report your symptoms clearly so that your doctor can determine what is causing you to feel weak and so that a plan of action can be put into place so that the weakness is resolved.

Weakness due to Atrial Fibrillation

You may feel weak if your atrial fibrillation is not well controlled. Having your heart beat fast is exhausting. Prolonged atrial fibrillation causes more weakness than intermittent, controlled episodes of it. Your body uses a great deal of energy as your heart contracts quickly. It is attempting to restore equilibrium. In addition, when your heart is beating rapidly, adequate amounts of oxygen may not be reaching the tissues of your body. Your brain uses a great deal of oxygen, so you may feel weak and dizzy at times. If this occurs, contact your doctor, or go to an emergency room.

Are you Sick or Tired?

Just because you have a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation does not mean that you won't feel tired due to common causes. Have you been eating a healthy diet? Are you experiencing a high level of stress? Do you have a cold or other illness? How much sleep do you get at night? Are you depressed? How much exercise have you gotten lately? Do you consume an adequate amount of fluids? Have you checked with your pharmacist to enquire if any of your medications could make you feel weak? Are you bored? Everyday life can be tiring. These factors are some of the most likely causes of weakness. Keep in mind that serious illnesses, such as diabetes and respiratory diseases cause weakness as well. If your weakness does not go away, or does not seem to be related to day to day life, consult with your health care provider.

Call 911 Immediately if you Think that your Weakness may be due to a Stroke!

Weakness, particularly of one side of the body, may be a sign of a stroke. Headache, dizziness, an inability to speak or smile, confusion, visual disturbances, or balance issues are signs of a stroke. Call for help immediately and get to an emergency room. Do not drive yourself there. Since you have atrial fibrillation, you have a high risk of developing blood clots. These can lodge in your brain. Many people suffer from transient ischemic attacks, also known as TIAs or mini- strokes. These are warning signs that a stroke may occur in the future. If you have a stroke, it is essential that you get medical attention immediately. Medication may be given if a stroke is diagnosed as soon as symptoms arise. The medication can dissolve clots which results in less debility .Getting help quickly may save your life.

Weakness May be a Sign of Heart Failure

If you have atrial fibrillation, you have an elevated risk of developing heart failure. In addition, many people develop atrial fibrillation as a result of heart problems, such as a heart attack, congestive heart failure, or cardiac surgery. Notify your health care provider promptly if you have feelings of generalized weakness, or if fluid accumulates in your legs or other parts of your body. If you experience shortness of breath, dizziness, chest or leg pain, call your doctor immediately, or go to the emergency room for further evaluation and treatment.

Next page: thyroid gland and what to do if you experience weakness.

Your Thyroid Gland May Cause You to Feel Weak

Thyroid disease is a common diagnosis. Your thyroid gland helps to determine how fast each process occurs within your body. Your doctor can order blood tests to determine how your thyroid gland is functioning.

The most common type of thyroid disease is called hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is often underdiagnosed. Signs of hypothyroidism include weight gain, feelings of weakness, and sleepiness. Your hair may be thin and your skin may be dry. You may feel depressed. Hypothyroidism is effectively treated with medication.

If you have an overactive thyroid gland, the condition is called hyperthyroidism. Hyperthyroidism is much less common than hypothyroidism. Signs of an overactive thyroid gland include, anxiety, palpitations, weight loss, bulging eyes and atrial fibrillation. You may sweat a lot. Uncontrolled hyperthyroidism can lead to heart failure. If this occurs, you may develop feelings of weakness and shortness of breath. You will need treatment with medications, radiation, or surgery.

Medications which are used to treat hyperthyroidism are not always effective. Doctors often recommend them as a means to avoid radiation and surgical intervention. The drugs slow down the heart rate and decrease episodes of atrial fibrillation. This results in less fatigue and weakness. Beta blocking heart medications may be recommended as well.

Do you Have a Rare Condition?

While it is highly unlikely, you may have a tumor in your heart which is called a myxoma. Myxomas are not cancerous, however they can grow rapidly. Signs of a myxoma include difficulty breathing, chest congestion, atrial fibrillation, weakness, fainting, fevers, and general achiness. An infection may be present. (Kaiser, 2007 second edition) Your doctor can order imaging studies if this rare condition is suspected. If you have a myxoma, you will need to have it removed surgically.

Do you have Another Arrhythmia?

Atrial fibrillation is a type of arrhythmia. An arrhythmia is an abnormal electrical pattern within the heart which causes your heart to beat differently than “normal”. Some arrhythmias are serious, and others go unnoticed. Sick

sinus syndrome is a type of disorder which sometimes accompanies atrial fibrillation. If you have sick sinus syndrome, your heart may beat erratically. It may sometimes beat fast, and sometimes slowly. Atrial fibrillation may alternate with other patterns of electrical activity. As you grow older, you are more likely to develop sick sinus syndrome. It may occur as a result of medication. You may have no symptoms of sick sinus syndrome or you may have several. You may feel weak and dizzy. Shortness of breath, congestive heart failure, or faintness may occur. If you have atrial fibrillation, you may have an elevated risk for having a stroke if you develop sick sinus syndrome. You are more likely to develop sick sinus syndrome if you have had a heart attack. A heart monitor can be used to diagnose sick sinus syndrome. If it is due to a medication, the medication which is causing the arrhythmia is discontinued. In that case, the problem may resolve without further intervention. Otherwise, sick sinus syndrome is treated with medication. A pacemaker may need to be inserted. Notify your doctor so that tests can be conducted, if you think that you may have sick sinus syndrome.

What to do if You Have Afib and Weakness

As you see, many conditions may cause you to feel weak if you have a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation. There are many additional causes which are not discussed here. In order to obtain a proper diagnosis and treatment, it is essential that you contact your health care provider.