Understanding AFib and Diabetes to Prevent Complications

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The Link Between AFib and Diabetes

Research indicates that Afib and diabetes are linked, as people who have diabetes are 40% more likely to develop atrial fibrillation.

People who have poorly controlled diabetes are at an even higher risk than individuals who have well controlled blood glucose levels.

How Diabetes Affects AFib Risk

If you have AFib or diabetes, your doctor should test you for both conditions. An EKG or Holter monitor can be used to diagnose AFib, while diabetes is diagnosed with blood tests. Tests measure of hemoglobin A1c, glucose tolerance, and fasting blood sugar levels.

A hemoglobin A1c level above seven is associated with a higher risk of AFib, and your chance of developing AFib rises by 3% for each year that you have diabetes.

Researchers have found that being diabetic is an independent risk factor for AFib regardless of weight and other factors. The risk may be related to inflammation and cardiovascular diseases that are common among individuals who have diabetes.

If you have diabetes, AFib, or both conditions, it is essential that you control both of them to the best of your ability in order to stay well and avoid complications.

Signs of Diabetes

Many people have diabetes or pre-diabetes without experiencing any symptoms. You may have diabetes if you experience the following signs and symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Frequent urination
- Sudden weight loss
- Frequent infections
- Wounds which heal poorly
- Excessive hunger
- Excessive thirst

- Blurry vision
- Frequent yeast infections
- Impotence

- Pain, tingling, or numbness in your fingers or toes
- Faintness

If you experience these symptoms contact your health care provider so that a diagnosis can be made and treatment may begin.

This will lower your risk for developing atrial fibrillation, improve your general state of health, and prevent complications of diabetes.

Next page: keeping your heart healthy with diabetes.

Complications of Diabetes

If you have diabetes you may develop life-threatening high or low blood sugar levels. People who have diabetes also have an elevated risk of being diagnosed with cardiovascular illnesses including high blood pressure, stroke, and heart attack.

Diabetics are at risk for serious infections, blindness, kidney failure, and loss of limbs. Fortunately, if you keep your blood glucose levels controlled well, your risk for developing these complications decreases dramatically.

Keeping Your Heart Healthy When You Have Diabetes

- Control your blood glucose levels and see your health care provider regularly. Try to keep your blood sugar levels between 70-100dL.
- Check your blood sugar as often as recommended by your health care provider. You will need to monitor your blood glucose more frequently if you are ill.
- Find out what your hemoglobin A1c level is. Ask your health care provider what a reasonable target for your A1c is.
- Obtain diagnostic tests as recommended by your health care practitioner. Your doctor should regularly monitor your blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, kidney function, blood count, and metabolic function. You may need an EKG, echocardiogram, stress, and other tests to evaluate the health of your heart and blood vessels.
- Treat high and low blood sugar promptly. Carry glucose tablets for emergencies.
- Eat a well-balanced healthy diet. Enjoy healthy carbohydrates and fats. Limit your intake of fats. Have protein with each meal.
- If you are overweight, consult with your health care provider regarding recommendations for weight loss.
- Learn how to count carbohydrates.
- If you take insulin, use it properly. Do not inject extra insulin just so that you can eat a bag of chocolates, for example.
- Take all of your medications as prescribed.

- Get regular exercise. Consult with your health care provider regarding snacks and insulin if you indulge in vigorous exercise.
- Consider using herbal remedies to promote blood sugar balance. If you choose to use herbs, consult with your health care provider prior to using them, as your diabetes medications and glucose testing schedule may need adjustment.
- Do not smoke.
- Learn the symptoms of atrial fibrillation. If signs or symptoms of atrial fibrillation develop, seek medical assistance.

Next page: how to prevent diabetes.

I Have AFib. What Should I Do to Prevent Diabetes?

Obtain and follow the recommendations of your health care provider regarding testing for diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses. Learn the signs and symptoms of diabetes. If you experience symptoms of diabetes, consult with your health care provider.

Take your medication as ordered. If you are taking blood thinners, take care to prevent injuring yourself from cuts and bruises. Follow the dietary recommendations provided by your doctor. Get blood tests as ordered. If you are overweight, take steps to lose excess weight.

Live Well

It may seem overwhelming to have a serious health condition and learn that you are at risk for yet another one. You may even get discouraged at times and think, “Why bother, I can’t do anything about it.”

Don’t let yourself go there. If you manage AFib or diabetes carefully, your efforts will have a major impact on your risk for developing complications and further ills. You have the knowledge and power to live well despite your illness. Learn all that you can about your condition and living well. Join a support group online or in your community.

Doing everything that you can to manage and cope with your illness is essential. However, living well is just as important. Be careful not to be so focused on your illness that you forget to enjoy your life.

Don’t live in fear. Take the necessary steps to manage your health and then let go of the outcomes. Spend time doing what you enjoy. Laugh and play with friends and family. Get outside and enjoy a sunset. Learn a new healthy, delicious recipe. Stay active. Do you like to dance? If you have been sedentary, consider taking a short stroll each morning.

Living well is an essential part of staying healthy. Even if you have physical challenges that do not permit you to engage in some of the activities you enjoy most, you can choose to try new activities. You may find them just as, or more enjoyable than some you no longer do.

It’s important to look at the big picture when living with any chronic challenge. Take care of your whole self. This includes taking steps to improve your physical and mental health. Nurture your relationships with others and acknowledge your spiritual needs.