Atrial Fibrillation Gender Differences

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AFib in Men vs. AFib in Women

It is well known that gender plays a role in cardiovascular diseases. Men experience coronary artery diseases (i.e. angina, heart attacks) differently compared to women in terms of symptoms, outcome, and how they respond to therapy. Likewise, gender differences are also seen in AFib.

Research

According to a review of studies published in 2005 in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, in all age groups men have higher incidence of AFib compared with women.

However, because this condition increases significantly with age, and there are more women than men aged 75 and up, the total number of women and men with AFib in the elderly population becomes equal. Generally speaking, women are diagnosed with AFib about five years older than men.

Women also tend to experience more AFib symptoms than men do, possibly because they typically have faster heart rates and smaller bodies. Women also experience more frequent AFib episodes and overall, a worse outcome.

Another review of scientific studies conducted at the Columbia University Medical Center in New York reveals that women with AFib have an increased risk of stroke, with an annual rate of 3% (versus 1.6% in men with AFib).

Some researchers believe that this difference may occur because women may not use blood thinners as much as men. Women over 75 years of age were more likely to have a stroke, compared with younger women, further suggests this study.

Preventing Complications Despite Your Gender

You can’t change your age, gender, or family history (which are all risk factors for AFib. However, you can avoid other risk factors by improving your lifestyle and getting the right treatment.

- See your doctor regularly, as your treatment may need to be adjusted over time. Tell your doctor if your symptoms are getting worse, or if you experience new symptoms. Never ignore your symptoms, especially any that suggest heart problems or complications of heart diseases such as:
    - Shortness of breath
    - Chest pain
    - Significant fatigue
    - Confusion
    - Palpitations
    - Dizziness

- Eat a healthy diet, which should include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and fish. Your diet should be low in salt and animal fats to keep your heart healthy and avoid high blood pressure and various heart conditions that are risk factors for the development of AFib.
- Exercise regularly, at least 3-4 times a week. Your workout routine should be adapted to your symptoms and fitness levels. Include some cardio exercises, as well as yoga and tai chi to better manage your weight and your stress levels – both of which are common AFib triggers.
- Do not smoke, consume coffee and alcohol in moderation, and keep yourself well hydrated by regularly checking the color of your urine: if the urine is clear white or light yellow, you are consuming enough water; if is darker, you need to increase your water intake.
- Always check with a doctor or pharmacist about the drugs you take, even over-the-counter drugs. Some medication (i.e. for colds and flu) over-stimulates the heart and can cause rapid heartbeat.