

Atrial fibrillation (AF)

Information for patients

This leaflet provides information on atrial fibrillation. If you have any queries or concerns, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you do not have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we do not ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is atrial fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common heart rhythm disturbance (arrhythmia) in adults.

AF is an irregular heart rhythm that is caused by abnormal electrical impulses in the atria (upper chambers of the heart). As a result, the atria no longer beat in an organised way and pump less efficiently.

What risks are associated with AF?

AF can cause blood to pool in the atria and increases the risk of blood clots forming. Blood clots formed in the heart may then travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

AF increases your risk of having a stroke by five times.

How common is AF?

Over 1 million people in the UK have AF. The chance of AF increases with age and it is more common in men.

AF is more likely to occur in people with other conditions including high blood pressure, diabetes, coronary heart disease and heart failure.

What are the symptoms of AF?

- Fast and irregular heartbeats called palpitations
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness

Some people do not have any symptoms.

How is AF diagnosed?

AF is diagnosed on a recording of the heart's electrical activity. This is most commonly detected on an electrocardiogram (ECG) but can also be found at pacemaker check-up.

What medications are available?

Medications are used to control heart rate and rhythm.

Anticoagulants reduce the risk of blood clots developing and causing stroke by two thirds.

Further information

You can visit the British Heart Foundation or the AF Association website for further information:

[Atrial fibrillation \(AF\) | British Heart Foundation \(bhf.org.uk\)](https://www.bhf.org.uk/atrial-fibrillation)

[AF Association - United Kingdom \(heartrhythmalliance.org\)](https://www.heartrhythmalliance.org/)

Contact details

King's College Hospital

Tel: 020 3299 5553

Princess Royal University Hospital

Tel: 01689 864263

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact Interpreting Services on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.interpreting@nhs.net.