

Skipping beats? Why flutters are a problem

Heed your heart

It makes for a good

storyline on the big screen, but if your heart skips a beat in real life, there is cause for concern. If you feel like your heart jumps, skips a beat, races, or flutters, you may have atrial fibrillation.

Atrial fibrillation, sometimes referred to as AFib, occurs when your heart beats irregularly. At least 2.7 million Americans are living with AFib, which can lead to life-threatening health problems, like blood clots, stroke, heart valve disease, heart failure, and other heart-related complications.

Diagnosing AFib

Diagnosing AFib is painless and only takes a few minutes. Several small electrodes are placed on

your skin to measure and record your heart's activity through an electrocardiogram (EKG). You must be experiencing an episode of AFib at the time of the EKG for it to be seen during the test. If your AFib episodes are infrequent, your doctor may have you wear an event monitor, which activates and tracks your heart activity when an episode occurs.

Treating AFib Your physician will consider your medical history and type of AFib, and then work with you to develop a treatment plan. Getting treatment and setting goals can save your life. Prescription medications, along with surgical and nonsurgical treatment options, are all available.

Preventing AFib To reduce your risk of getting AFib, there are lifestyle choices you can implement now.

- ✓ Exercise regularly
- ✓ Eat a heart-healthy diet low in salt, cholesterol, and saturated and trans fats
- ✓ Manage blood pressure
- ✓ Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol
- ✓ Don't smoke
- ✓ Control cholesterol
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight

Sources: American Heart Association, American Stroke Association

Take a brain vacation

Short mental breaks offer big benefits

Experiencing stress is normal, and some stress is even good for you. But too much stress affects more than your mood.

"If left unchecked, stress can contribute to larger health concerns, like high blood pressure, heart disease, a weakened immune system, obesity, and diabetes," says cardiologist Sateesh Kesari, MD.

Since it isn't possible to completely check out and take an actual vacation every time stress sneaks into our lives, try these five stress-reducing techniques the next time you're on a deadline at work, busy taking care of children, or stuck in traffic.



Visualize relaxation.

Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine a relaxing scene like sitting on a beach, feeling the sun on your skin, and listening to the waves. Or imagine walking through a meadow or woods while birds sing. Focusing on the sights, sounds, and smells will help immerse your body in relaxation.



3 types of AFib

- 1 Paroxysmal:** Sporadic episodes that come and go.
- 2 Persistent:** Atrial fibrillation that does not stop by itself. Requires medication or shock to return to normal rhythm.
- 3 Permanent:** Atrial fibrillation that cannot be corrected by medication or shock.

▼ ATTEND A FREE SEMINAR

Register to attend a free Health Night Out about stress and heart health on Aug. 24. To sign up, visit ketteringhealth.org/healthcalendar



Breathe deeply.

Take deep, controlled breaths. Practice breathing from your diaphragm—you should feel your abdomen expanding rather than your shoulders lifting. Breathing from your diaphragm oxygenates your blood, which can help you relax almost instantly. It also helps slow down your heart rate.



Turn your gaze outward.

Instead of focusing on everything you have to do and the things that are causing you stress, cast your gaze outward. Look out a window, people-watch, and notice any birds or clouds within view. Allow yourself to daydream for a few minutes.



Remember 10.

Before responding in a stressful situation when you may be angry or flustered, pause and count to 10. Allow yourself the time to process the information and form an appropriate response. Also ask yourself, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how big of an issue is this?” By taking a step back and giving a situation some perspective, you can help control your response and stress level.



Turn on the tunes.

Music is proven to have a soothing effect on emotions. If you are unsure what kind of music helps calm you down, try some instrumental and classical music. Play the radio in the car, turn on a playlist when you’re in the shower or getting ready, or pop in some earbuds while you’re prepping for a presentation.