

Catheter Ablation

A one-page guide for patients
with Atrial Fibrillation or Atrial Flutter



What is Catheter Ablation?

Atrial fibrillation is caused by extra beats that come from areas of heart tissue in the top chambers of the heart (the atria). Catheter Ablation (or just “ablation”) is a procedure where a type of energy is applied to that tissue to try to inactivate it. In the majority of patients, medications can improve or stabilize their atrial fibrillation symptoms. Ablations are most useful in patients who continue to have symptoms that negatively affect their daily lives despite their medications or in whom medications are not an option.

What is involved?

Narrow, flexible catheters are inserted into a large blood vessel in the neck or groin. These are then passed into the heart. This process is guided by special x-rays. Once the catheter reaches the heart, it can help identify the areas where the extra beats are coming from. Energy is then used to inactivate the tissue to try to stop the extra beats so that a “regular” healthy heart rhythm can be restored.

How well does it work?

The success of the ablation procedure depends on a few things like:

- The type of rhythm problem you have and how long you’ve had it
- Whether you have other problems with your heart
- Your age and any other medical problems you may have

It’s important to note that even if the procedure is successful, if you currently need anticlotting medications to help prevent stroke with your atrial fibrillation, you will likely need to continue those for the rest of your life.

How do I know if I should speak to someone about ablation for my atrial fibrillation?

Answer the following questions:

- Are your atrial fibrillation symptoms affecting your quality of life despite taking heart rhythm medications every day?
- Have your heart rhythm medications caused troublesome side effects?
- Are you having difficulty taking heart rhythm medications every day?

If you answered YES to one or more of the questions above, it may be valuable to have your doctor refer you to a heart specialist to discuss the option of catheter ablation. Remember that there are benefits and risks to any medical procedure. Your doctor can help you decide if ablation is right for you.



This handout was created by a team of family doctors and specialists working with the AFIB Innovation Program.
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