

Atrial Fibrillation (A-Fib) After Ablation Care

You had an atrial fibrillation (A-Fib or AF) ablation to try to correct a problem with your heartbeat.

This *Health Facts for You* will review what to expect and how to care for yourself at home.

What to Expect

You will rest in the recovery area for a few hours after your ablation. Depending on your recovery, you may go home, or stay at the hospital.

After your procedure, you may have:

- Soreness or tenderness at the puncture sites that may last 1 week.
- Bruising at the site that may take 2-3 weeks to go away.
- Periods of A-Fib or a fluttering feeling in your chest over the next 3-6 months. This should improve as the swelling and irritation improves.

Pain Control

- You may take a mild pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Motrin®) or other NSAID medicines. NSAIDs increase your risk of bleeding, especially if you are on a blood thinner. Please ask your care team if these medicines are safe for you to take after the procedure.
- You may place an ice pack or warm pack over the site for 20 minutes every 2 hours. Gently wipe the puncture site after you remove the pack if it is wet.

Care of the Puncture Site(s)

It is important that you take care of your sites to prevent an infection. Keep the sites clean and dry for 24 hours.

You may remove the dressing(s) and shower after 24 hours. Remove the dressing over the site before taking a shower. To care for the puncture site:

- Gently clean the site for 3 days with soap and water, pat dry, and leave open to air.
- Keep the site dry.
- Inspect the site daily for redness, swelling, or drainage.
- You may feel a small lump (dime to quarter size) under the skin. Most of the time, this goes away within 6 weeks. In some cases, it can persist if scar tissue forms.
- Please let us know if you have any new or increasing pain at the site.

Activity

- **Avoid** strenuous activity.
- **Do not** lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for 7 days.
- **Avoid** baths, hot tubs, swimming pools, lakes, or rivers until the area is fully healed.
- **Do not** make any important decisions until the next day.
- **Do not** drive for 24 hours, unless told otherwise.
- You may resume normal activity in 7 days.

Going Home

- We will review discharge instructions with you.
- Have someone drive you back home. If you go home the same day, you will need someone to stay with you overnight.
- **Do not** drive for 24 hours, unless told otherwise.

Heart Healthy Diet

Include heart healthy foods in your diet, such as: vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, lean meat, fish, and whole grains. **Limit sodium, alcohol, and sugar.**

Lifestyle Changes

- **Do not** smoke.
- Be active. Try for at least 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week. Talk to your care team about what type of level of exercise is safe for you.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Lose weight if you need to.
- Manage health problems such as high blood pressure, sleep apnea, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

Medicines

You will receive instructions about medicines after your procedure.

Take your blood thinner for the next 3 months. **Do not** skip any doses. Many patients will need to keep taking their blood thinner after ablation.

If you take Coumadin (warfarin), you will need to have a PT/INR level checked (and may need dose adjusted) within 3-5 days of discharge.

Follow-up Visits

- You will have an ECG in 1 month.
- You will also have a clinic visit with your advanced practice clinician or heart rhythm doctor in about 3 months and 12 months.
- You may also wear a heart monitor to look at your heart rhythm at 6 months.

Return to Work

Ask your clinician when it is safe to return to work.

When to Get Emergency Help

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- Trouble swallowing, or you are coughing up or vomiting blood.
- Severe swelling, new numbness, weakness, or coldness in your body (arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet, toes).
- Skin that turns blue.
- Sudden bleeding or swelling at the groin puncture site(s). If this occurs, apply direct pressure. If the bleeding does not stop after 10 minutes of constant pressure on the site, call 911. Keep pressure on the site until help arrives.
- Signs of stroke:
 - Sudden face drooping, arm or leg numbness /weakness, confusion
 - Trouble seeing, trouble speaking, trouble walking, or severe headache

When to Call

Call your care team if you have:

- Chest pain or new back pain
- Increased shortness of breath
- Signs of infection around the puncture site, such as:
 - Redness
 - Warmth
 - Swelling
 - Drainage
- A fever over 101.5°F
- Trouble urinating
- A sudden increase in weight overnight (more than 3 pounds), or over a few days, this could be a sign of fluid retention
- Questions or concerns about stopping your blood thinner
- A-Fib that lasts longer than 24 hours or if you do not feel well.

Who to Call

UW Health Heart and Vascular Clinic
Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm
(608) 915-0200

After hours, nights, weekends, and holidays this number will give you the paging operator. Ask for the cardiology fellow on call. Give your full name and phone number with the area code. A clinician will call you back.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8276.