Procedure to Close the Left Atrial Appendage

This handout explains what a left atrial appendage is, why it may need to be closed, and how that is done.

Left Atrial Appendage (LAA)
The LAA is a small area in the left atrium of your heart. It does not serve a purpose, so it is not needed.

When a person has atrial fibrillation (a-fib), the top part of their heart does not beat in a regular pattern. Because of how the LAA is shaped, blood can pool in it and form clots. It is believed that most of the clots formed in the heart come from the LAA. These clots can move up to the brain and cause a stroke.

Watchman Procedure
During this procedure, a device called a Watchman is placed in the LAA. This will close off the LAA, so clots do not form. While many people take blood thinners to decrease their chance of forming a clot, some people can't take these medicines long-term. Having a closure device may be an option for people taking long-term blood thinners.

Insurance Coverage
The procedure is covered by all major insurance companies including Medicare for patients that qualify. Your coordinator may be able to help you with any insurance issues.

Candidates for Watchman
To be considered for the device, there are criteria that you must meet:

- A-Fib that is not due to a heart valve problem.
- Can't tolerate long-term blood thinners due to:
  - History of serious bleeding while taking them.
  - Job, condition, or hobbies that increase your bleeding risk.
  - Not able to take your blood thinners correctly.
  - High risk for falls.
- Can take blood thinners short-term.
- Can undergo the procedure.
- Can complete follow-up visits.

You don't meet the criteria if:

- You are allergic to nickel or titanium.
- Your LAA is too small or too large and the device would not fit.
- You take blood thinners for reasons other than a-fib.
- You can't meet any of the criteria.

Before the Procedure
If you meet criteria, we will schedule you to meet one of the doctors. At that visit you will talk about the Watchman device and procedure to decide if it is the best option for you. You will have the chance to get all your questions answered. You may also need to have a special image of your heart done to be sure the right size device is used.

The Day of Procedure
On the day of your procedure, you will go to the Heart and Vascular Procedure Center (F6/3). Once there you will meet your nurse, doctor and other staff who will answer your questions and make sure you are comfortable.

During the Procedure
We will watch you closely during the procedure.

1. You will have patches placed on your chest to monitor your heart. You will also have a plastic clip on your finger to watch your oxygen levels.
2. You will have a small tube (IV) in your vein to give medicine.
3. You will have a small tube in your artery to check your blood pressure.
4. You will get medicine to make you sleep during the procedure.
5. A breathing tube will be placed, along with a camera to guide the procedure.
6. A small poke is made in a large vein in your groin, and a catheter (thin tube) is placed all the way up to the heart.
7. The catheter passes from the right side of the heart to the left side. This assures the correct position for the device.
8. Once in place, the tube is removed and the closure device is left in.

After the Procedure
We will watch you closely and help control your pain. Before you leave, you will learn how to care for yourself at home.

Going Home
A family member or friend **must** drive you home. It would be helpful for that person to stay with you for the first day or two. They should be present the day you go home so they can hear the instructions.

Medicines
You will get prescriptions for medicines. If you plan to fill them at the hospital pharmacy, please bring your insurance card with you.

Follow-Up
Your follow-up care includes:

- You will need an image of your heart taken in 45 days.
- You will have a separate clinic visit with the doctor that placed the device.
- You will need lab draws after 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years. These can be done at your local clinic if you do not live in Madison. A nurse will call you about the lab draws.

Who to Call
You may contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

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

After clinic hours, nights, weekends, and holidays your call will go to our after-hours answering service.

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 © 2/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8055.