What is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial Fibrillation, also known as AF, is an issue where the heart beats irregularly. This is also known as an arrhythmia, which is where your heart has an abnormal rhythm. AF happens when the atria (the upper two chambers of your heart) begin to fibrillate, also known as quivering. This fibrillation in your heart will stop it from beating in a normal rhythm.

Because the heart is beating irregularly, the flow of your blood will also be irregular. This is a risk factor for blood clots to form, increasing your risk of conditions such as stroke.

What are the symptoms?

Sometimes, arrhythmias such as AF may present with no symptoms at all. There are two different types of symptoms for AF; typical and atypical. Women are more likely to present with atypical symptoms, as well as presenting after a longer duration of symptoms.

**Typical Symptoms:**
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations
- Dizziness

**Atypical Symptoms:**
- Weakness
- Fatigue

What are the causes?

There are many known causes for AF, typically around a disease or event which has an impact on the heart. Some of the known causes of AF are listed below, however it is important to know sometimes no cause can be found for AF:

- Heart Failure, a condition where the heart’s pumping function is impaired.
- Valvular diseases in the heart, where the flow of blood in the heart can be interrupted
- Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure
- Surgery on your chest, such as Bypass Surgery
- Sleep apnoea
- Certain medications
- Obesity
- Illnesses such as pneumonia
- Over-exercising
- Increased consumption of social drugs such as alcohol
- Hyperthyroidism (your thyroid gland is overactive)
Heart Health Fact Sheet
Atrial Fibrillation

What are the statistics?
Around 3.73 women are lost per day to AF in Australia, in comparison to 2.14 per day for men.
Women made up around 63% of the total Australians who died in 2017 of a cardiac arrhythmia such as AF.
Women tend to have a lower quality of life when diagnosed with AF compared men.
It is estimated that between 10-30% of the population with AF are not diagnosed.

What are the treatments?
MEDICATION TREATMENT FOR AF:
• Medications for stroke risk: Anticoagulant tablets reduce your risk of blood clots which can lead to strokes when you have AF. These tablets names include Warfarin and Novel Oral Anti-Coagulants (NOACs), which have names such as Dabigatran, Rivaroxaban and Apixaban.
• Medications for normalising your heart rhythm: These medications have names including sotalol, flecainide and amiodarone.
• Medications for slowing your heart rate: These medications include digoxin, beta-blockers (e.g. atenolol and metoprolol) as well as calcium channel blockers (e.g. diltiazem).
TAKE ALL MEDICATIONS AS DIRECTED BY YOUR DOCTOR AND PHARMACIST

PROCEDURES FOR AF:
• Cardioversion: Cardioversion is a painless procedure which attempts to get your heart back to a normal rhythm. you are given a general anesthetic (put to sleep) and gentle electric currents are sent to the heart to put it back to normal rhythm.
• Catheter Ablation: your doctor will send energy to parts of your heart to remove the section that can cause fast heart beat. Before removing the tissue, your doctor will map out which sections of the heart are causing the abnormal rhythm.
• Pacemaker: pacemakers are small devices that control your heart rate with electrical signals. The device sits on your left or right shoulder under your skin, with leads sitting in your heart providing the electric signals.

Resources
- AF Alliance Patient Factsheets
  http://www.heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/au/patient-resources
- Heart Support Australia is a NFP aimed at providing support and resources for people after a cardiac event
  https://www.heartsupport.org.au/
- Atrial Fibrillation Support Forum
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/AtrialFibrillationSupportForum/