

What Is Atrial Flutter/Atrial Fibrillation?

The heart has its own electrical system. This system makes the signals that start each heartbeat. The heartbeat begins in 1 of the 2 upper chambers of the heart (atria). A problem can make the atria beat faster than normal. The atria may beat fast but still evenly. This problem is called atrial flutter. If the atria beat very fast and also unevenly, it is called atrial fibrillation (AFib).

Causes of Atrial Flutter & Atrial Fibrillation

Causes of these problems can include:

- Previous heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Thyroid problems

In many cases, the cause is unknown.

When the Atria Beat Too Fast

The atria may beat fast only once in a while. This is called a paroxysmal heart rhythm problem. If they beat fast all the time, it is a chronic problem.

Atrial Flutter

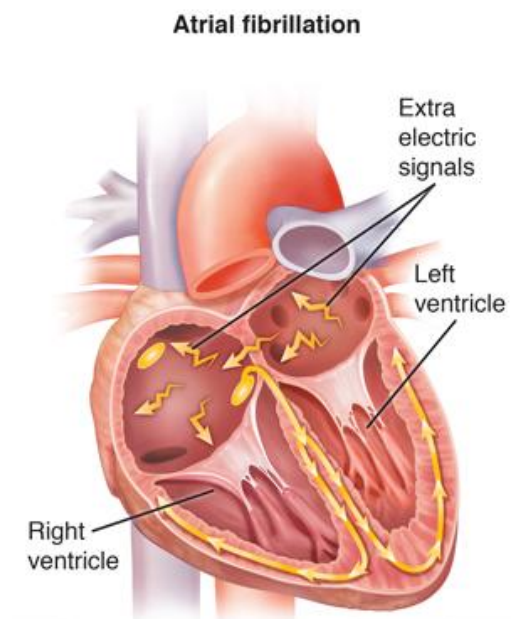
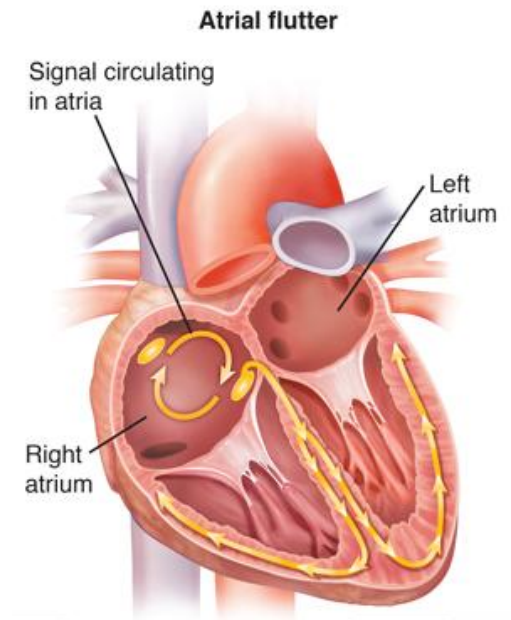
With atrial flutter, electrical signals travel around and around inside the atria. These circling signals make the atria beat too fast:

- Atrial flutter can cause symptoms similar to AFib. It can also lead to the even faster, uneven rhythms of AFib.

Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)

With AFib, cells in the atria send extra electrical signals. These extra signals make the atria beat very fast. They also beat unevenly:

- The atria beat so fast and unevenly that they may quiver instead of contracting. If the atria don't contract, they don't move enough blood into the 2 lower chambers of the heart (ventricles). This can cause you to feel dizzy or weak.
- Blood that doesn't keep moving can pool and form clots in the atria. These clots can move into other parts of the body and cause serious problems such as a stroke.



Symptoms of Atrial Flutter and AFib

These symptoms include the following:

- Palpitations (a fluttering, fast heartbeat)
- Weakness or tiredness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or tightness
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Fainting spells

Heart Valve Problems: Mitral Valve Prolapse

Mitral valve prolapse is a common heart valve problem. With this condition, the valve that separates the chambers of the left side of the heart doesn't open and close properly. Extra tissue in the valve can stop it from closing properly and can make it leaky.

Most cases of mitral valve prolapse are not serious. Usually only a small amount of blood leaks backward. This causes no problem and doesn't need treatment. But sometimes a larger amount can leak backward. This can lead to a serious problem and will require surgery to fix.

Symptoms of Mitral Valve Prolapse

Mitral valve prolapse may not cause symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may feel one or more of the following:

- Mild chest pain
- Pounding or racing heart (palpitations)
- Shortness of breath when lying down
- Trouble breathing with activity

Possible Causes

Mitral valve prolapse is often present from birth. But in some people, it can develop later in life. In some cases, the condition is inherited (passed down from your parents).

Treating Mitral Valve Prolapse

Most people with mitral valve prolapse have mild disease that is stable and doesn't need to be treated. But sometimes the valves get more stretched out over time and can cause symptoms. Medications can help relieve symptoms. Your doctor may ask you to come in from time to time for tests to check your heart valve and to be sure the problem hasn't gotten worse.

