

# **Atrial fibrillation (AF) and atrial flutter (AFL) in the Cardiac Device Clinic**

This leaflet explains more about what atrial fibrillation (AF) and atrial flutter (AFL) are, what it means for you and the next steps for your treatment.

## **Why have I received this leaflet?**

During your tests in our Cardiac Device Clinic, your pacemaker or defibrillator has indicated that you have experienced an abnormal rhythm in the top chambers of your heart (known as the atria). One or more episodes of AF and/or AFL have been documented in your tests.

## **What are AF and AFL?**

AF and AFL are both types of abnormal heart beats (arrhythmias), which originate in the atria. AF is the most common of these, and causes the heart to beat irregularly and sometimes very fast. AFL can also cause the heart to beat faster but the heart beat tends to be less irregular.

## **What does having AF or AFL mean for me?**

AF / AFL in itself is not life threatening; however symptoms such as palpitations (heart beats that suddenly become more noticeable), breathlessness and tiredness can have an effect on your day to day life.

Often, people do not experience symptoms, and AF / AFL is picked up during a device check (as we have done today).

## **What are the risks of AF / AFL?**

The main issue with AF and AFL is that they can increase your risk of having a stroke, regardless of whether you experience symptoms or not. Both AF and AFL cause blood to pool in the atria which can cause a blood clot to form, and may lead to a stroke.

We have calculated an initial score of your risk of stroke due to AF / AFL, called the CHA<sub>2</sub>DS<sub>2</sub>-VASc score. This calculation captures the most common stroke risk factors you may have, such as raised blood pressure, age, gender, previous stroke, diabetes and heart failure.

A higher score is associated with an increased risk of stroke. If the score is high your doctor will want to discuss the use of anticoagulation (blood thinning) medication with you, to reduce the risk of clots forming and of having a stroke.

**Important information overleaf**

## What do I need to do now?

The important thing is that we have discovered that you have had episodes of AF / AFL.

We will send a letter to your GP to share today's findings with them. You will also be given a copy of this letter in the clinic. **We recommend you take this to your GP and make an appointment this week** to discuss your AF or AFL, its risk factors, potential medication and the most appropriate management.

*It is important that you do this to reduce your risks of future problems.*

## Further sources of information

### Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA)

A charity that focuses on raising awareness of atrial fibrillation by providing information and support materials for patients and medical professionals involved in detecting, diagnosing and managing atrial fibrillation.

**t:** 01789 867 502 **e:** [info@afa.org.uk](mailto:info@afa.org.uk) **w:** [www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk](http://www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk)

## Contact us

If you have any further questions, please call us on our heart device hotline:  
**020 7401 9249** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

## NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)