



ADVERTISER CONTENT

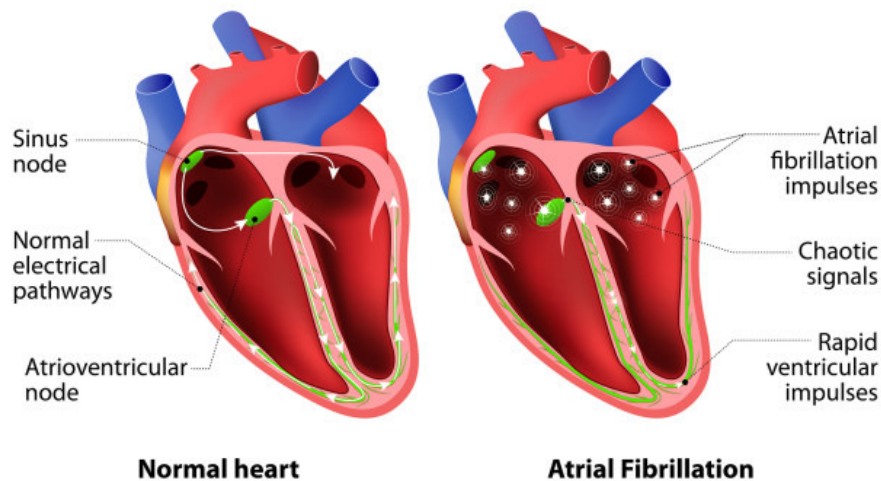
New implant lets many AFib patients stop taking blood-thinners

By Tenet Florida Physician Services

Updated 07:24 PM Wednesday, Jul. 05, 2017



Cardiac arrhythmia



Atrial Fibrillation (AFib), the most common cardiac arrhythmia, affects an estimated [33.5 million](#) people worldwide and up to six million people in the U.S. alone. One of the greatest risks to people who have AFib is stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)), individuals with AFib have a five times greater risk of suffering a stroke than people who do not have AFib, and strokes caused by complications from AFib are generally more severe than strokes caused by other medical conditions. That's why a new treatment to help prevent stroke in patients with AFib is so exciting.

In 2015, the [FDA approved](#) the use of a medical implant, called the Watchman, to help prevent strokes in people who have atrial fibrillation. Preliminary studies found the Watchman was effective at preventing strokes caused by bleeding in the brain and 92 percent of patients who had the device implanted were able to stop taking blood-thinning medications.

“Some of our patients with atrial fibrillation live in fear of having a stroke, and until recently, our best treatment options were medications that can have some pretty serious side effects,” says Dr. Brijeshwar Maini, interventional cardiologist with Tenet Florida Physician Services (TFPS) and director of transcatheter therapies for Tenet Coastal Region. “This new device, the Watchman implant, offers a permanent solution to prevent many strokes caused by AFib and to allow patients to wean off their blood-thinning medications. It is an exciting new option for many of our patients.”

What is AFib?

Atrial fibrillation is a type of abnormal heart beat or arrhythmia. During AFib, the heart beats fast and at an irregular rate. AFib occurs when abnormal tissue forms in the heart. This tissue causes electrical impulses in the heart to become weakened and irregular. These irregular electrical signals cause the atria, the upper chambers of the heart, to quiver instead of contracting fully. When this happens, blood does not completely empty from the atria and a pouch called the left atrial appendage (LAA) forms. As blood pools inside the LAA, clots can form, and when these clots leave the heart, they can block blood vessels and cause stroke or heart damage. Researchers estimate that over 20 percent of all strokes occur in people who have AFib.

Medications to prevent stroke

The most common treatment to help prevent strokes in patients with AFib is oral antiplatelet or anticoagulant medication often called blood thinners. These medications are taken to prevent blood clots from forming. Commonly prescribed [blood-thinning medications](#) include: warfarin, dabigatran, rivaroxaban, edoxaban, apixaban and in rare cases, aspirin.

While these medications are effective, they have significant side effects, the most important of which is an increased risk of bleeding. This is a serious complication that can lead to hospitalization and death. Individuals taking blood-thinning medications should seek medical treatment immediately if they experience any of these symptoms:

- Unusual bleeding, bruising or blood blisters
- Bleeding gums
- Feeling weak, faint or dizzy

- Red, dark brown or black urine or stools
 - An accident of any kind
 - Persistent severe headache or stomachache
 - Pregnancy or unusually heavy menstrual bleeding
-

“Excessive bleeding is a frightening and dangerous experience for people with AFib and their family members. Sometimes, the cure can feel like it’s worse than the disease,” says Dr. Saurabh Sanon, TFPS Interventional Cardiologist and an expert in Structural Heart Transcatheter Therapies. “If we can lower that additional risk and prevent these complications, while mitigating stroke risk - that’s what we want for all our patients. The Watchman procedure is a big step forward in that direction.”

New treatment option

A new treatment option for people with AFib is a procedure to close the left atrial appendage (LAA). Doctors do this by installing a Watchman implant. While the patient is under general anesthesia, a thin tube, called a catheter, is placed in a blood vessel and then moved through the blood vessel into the heart. Next, the Watchman device is guided through the catheter, into the atria and to the LAA.

Once the catheter reaches the LAA, it is moved into place over the opening of the LAA. The Watchman opens like a tiny umbrella and blocks blood flow into the LAA. The catheter is then gently removed. After a few weeks, the heart will grow new tissue across the Watchman device, permanently sealing off the LAA, which prevents blood from having a place to collect and form clots.



Follow your doctor's instructions regarding medication

Once the Watchman is installed, doctors may change the medications prescribed to treat AFib, and some medications may be stopped all together. However, never stop taking a prescribed medication unless your doctor instructs you to do so. It is generally necessary to continue taking blood thinners for a few weeks after the Watchman procedure while the new tissue is growing inside the heart.

Stroke is one of the greatest risks to people living with atrial fibrillation. While blood-thinning medications have helped patients avoid stroke, they have significant side effects. New treatment options such as the Watchman device are offering hope to millions who live with AFib without the additional complications medications may cause.

[Tenet Florida Physician Services](#)

855-995-8346

www.TFPSHeart.com



**Tenet Florida
Physician Services**

**THIS TINY DEVICE
CAN REDUCE
YOUR RISK
OF STROKE.**

FIND OUT MORE