

Contact: Laura Young, director, Marketing & Public Relations; laura.young@sghs.org, 912-466-2148

Be Heart Smart: Understand Your AFib Risk

BRUNSWICK, Georgia: September 20, 2023 – The human heart is a miraculous machine when all goes well. If you are one of the millions of individuals with atrial fibrillation, however, your heart doesn't perform as it should, and this puts you at risk for serious health issues.



“Atrial fibrillation or AFib, happens when the two upper chambers of the heart – the atria – beat irregularly and too fast,” explains Matthew Certain, MD, a board-certified cardiologist with Southeast Georgia Physician Associates-Cardiology. “This interferes with normal blood flow and increases the risk of blood clots and stroke. In fact, AFib can increase your risk of stroke up to four or five times.”

Unlike chronic AFib, heart palpitations can also occur from excessive caffeine consumption or from certain medications, but these symptoms are generally temporary.

AFib Awareness Month in September is an ideal time to learn more about this common condition.

What Does AFib Feel Like?

“AFib can be elusive because some people don't experience any symptoms,” says Certain. He adds that many individuals do experience certain symptoms:

- Racing, irregular or fluttering heartbeat
- Lightheadedness
- Chest pain or pressure
- Shortness of breath, even when resting
- Fatigue

How is AFib Diagnosed?

“If AFib is suspected, or the patient experiences symptoms associated with it, an electrocardiogram (EKG) can determine if the electrical signals within the heart are activating normally. These signals make the heart contract and pump blood,” explains Certain.

You Don't Want to Ignore AFib

Certain adds that AFib is manageable but left untreated, it can cause serious health risks. In addition to stroke, that can include heart attack or heart failure. “By interfering with the heart's ability to pump blood, atrial fibrillation may cause blood to pool in the atria, leading to blood clots. This is why the stroke risk is so much higher in people with AFib.”

How is AFib Treated?

“Fortunately, there are several treatment options. Beta blockers and other medications can restore the heart's normal rhythm or slow the heart rate. Catheter ablation or cardioversion procedures help control the electrical impulses causing AFib. We may also recommend anticoagulant or antiplatelet

medications to prevent blood clots. In some patients, a pacemaker or other surgical procedure resolves the problem,” Certain says.

You can lower your AFib risk by following the American Heart Association’s “Life’s Essential 8”:

1. Eat better
2. Become more active
3. Quit tobacco
4. Get healthy sleep
5. Manage weight
6. Control cholesterol
7. Manage blood sugar
8. Manage blood pressure

“AFib can happen to anyone at any age. If you experience a fluttering heartbeat, dizziness, shortness of breath, chest pressure and/or regularly feel tired for no apparent reason, talk to your doctor. We can get your heart back on track and help you avoid a more serious setback,” says Certain.

To schedule a consultation with Southeast Georgia Physician Associates-Cardiology, call 912-466-7660.

ABOUT SOUTHEAST GEORGIA HEALTH SYSTEM

Southeast Georgia Health System is a not-for-profit health system comprised of two acute care hospitals, two long term care facilities, two comprehensive Cancer Care Centers and multiple specialty care centers, including orthopaedic and spine care, joint replacement, breast care, maternity, outpatient rehabilitation, sleep management and wound care. The Brunswick Campus Cancer Care Center is accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer and is one of the few centers in Georgia to offer CyberKnife® M6 with MLC. Additionally, the Brunswick Campus is accredited by The Joint Commission as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center and the Camden Campus is accredited as an Acute Stroke Ready Hospital. The Southeast Georgia Physician Associates medical group includes more than 160 providers working in 20 different medical specialties at more than 50 locations. The Health System is part of Coastal Community Health, a regional affiliation between Baptist Health and Southeast Georgia Health System, a highly integrated hospital network focused on significant initiatives designed to enhance the quality and value of care provided to our contiguous communities. For more information, visit sghs.org.

###