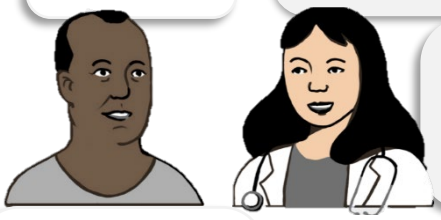
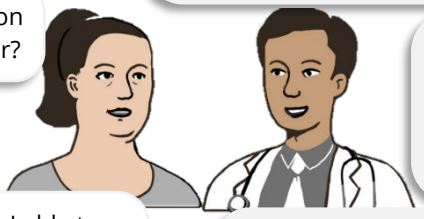
ATRIAL FIBRILLATION (AFib):

Shared Decision-Making Resource for Patients and Healthcare Professionals

In shared decision-making, patients and healthcare professionals work together to make the best possible healthcare decisions. These decisions consider fact-based information about available options, the clinician's knowledge and experience, and the patient's values, questions, and preferences.

STEPS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING	SAMPLE TALKING POINTS
S Seek Your Patient's Participation	What is Atrial Fibrillation?
	Atrial Fibrillation (also known as AFib) is the most common cause of irregular heartbeat. It's caused by abnormal electrical impulses that disrupt the heart's natural rhythm. It can lead to blood clots and increase your risk of stroke. Would you like to learn more?
H Help Your Patient Explore and Compare Options	Yes. What can I do about it?
	
	First, we will identify which type of AFib you have. We will also see if you have any other underlying conditions and see which treatment options, including lifestyle changes may be best.
A Assess Your Patient's Values and Preferences	I'm not sure I have time to change my habits, or that I want to take medication.
	Treatment options may include: medications to alter the rate and rhythm, anticoagulants, or procedures like ablation, or inserting a pacemaker. And reducing the risk of blood clots and stroke with anticoagulants or blood thinners.
R Reach A Decision with Your Patient	Will I need to be on treatment forever?
	
	AFib typically recurs and requires lifelong treatment to reduce symptoms and prevent stroke and heart failure.
E Evaluate Your Patient's Decision	Am I able to continue with my daily activities?
	I understand that lifestyle changes and treatment may feel daunting. We can think about different ways to make them part of your life. What is important to you?
D Decide Which Resources Can Support Your Patient	Where can I learn more?
	You can learn more by talking with your healthcare team, which could include your physician, pharmacist, nurse, cardiologist, and dietitian. What questions do you have?

Find this resource and other guides at natforum.org/AFIB_Guide and natforum.org/Shared_Decision.

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FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Atrial Fibrillation (AFib) Shared Decision-Making Guide

Step 1: Seek Your Patient's Participation

Many patients are not aware that they can and should participate in their healthcare decision-making. Communicate that a choice exists and invite your patient to participate in the process.

Summarize the health problem:

- "AFib can have many causes, but it's often due to heart structure problems, including coronary artery disease, heart attack, heart valve problems, congenital defects, infection, and lung diseases."
- "AFib increases the risk of blood clots in the heart, increasing the risk of stroke, heart failure, and other heart-related complications.
- "Risk factors for AFib include high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, obesity, increased age, and certain inherited genes."
- "AFib can also be triggered by infections, surgery, stress, alcohol, and repeated vigorous endurance exercises. These may be reversible causes of AFib and may not require rhythm control drugs or blood thinners if Afib is short-lived and doesn't come back."

Invite your patient to be involved in decisions. Invite your patient to ask questions and discuss options with you: "I'd like to discuss treatment options with you. We can then decide together which may be best for you."

Step 2: Help Your Patient Explore and Compare Options

Discussing options with your patient can help you build a more trusting relationship.

Assess what your patient already knows about his or her options.

- "What do you understand about treating/managing AFib?"

Explain each option clearly, using plain language. Avoid using technical or medical jargon. Point out when there are clear differences between specific options.

- "There are different ways to treat/manage AFib including:
  - Medications: To control the heart's rate, restore rhythm, or reduce the risk of blood clots and stroke.
  - Lifestyle changes: To reduce the risks of AFib, such as exercising, losing weight, controlling blood pressure, and avoiding alcohol and salt.
  - Procedures: Electrical shock (cardioversion), and ablation via catheter procedures or minimally evasive surgery, can help restore normal rhythm. For patients who cannot take blood thinners, implants in the heart that can shut off the small chamber where clots usually form may be an option (left atrial occlusion devices)."
- "More information is available at CardioSmart.org/AFib."

Discuss the benefits, risks, and expected outcomes of each option. Take into account risk factors and offer guideline-based recommendations.

"Learn about medications, procedures, and support for managing AFib:

- CardioSmart.org/AFib
- Managing AFib: https://www.stopafib.org/managing-afib/
- Stroke Prevention for Patients with AFib: https://www.patientdecisionaid.org/icd/atrial-fibrillation/"

FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

AFib Shared Decision-Making Guide (Cont'd.)

A

Step 3: Assess Your Patient's Values and Preferences

Encourage your patient to talk about what is important to him or her regarding the options. Use open-ended questions and listen actively to your patient.

- "What are the benefits of reducing the risks of AFib for you?" "What are the disadvantages?"
- "Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages?"
- "What lifestyle and treatment goals are achievable for you?"
- "What will motivate you to stay on a treatment plan?"

Hear and acknowledge the values and preferences that matter to your patient. Paraphrase what you have heard. This assures your patient you are listening to his or her perspective.

R

Step 4: Reach a Decision With Your Patient

Ask if he or she is ready to make a decision or if they have any additional questions. Schedule another session if your patient requests more time to consider the options.

- "The severity of your symptoms will impact your quality of life. Minimizing your symptoms and controlling your heart's rate and rhythm will help improve your quality of life."
- "Now that we discussed your options for treating AFib, which lifestyle changes and treatment options do you think are right for you?" or "What questions do you have about the options?"

The decisions can be documented in the accompanying **"AFib Treatment Planning Worksheet" (pages 5-6 of this document)**.

E

Step 5: Evaluate Your Patient's Decision

Make plans to review the decision in the future. Remind your patient that decisions may be reviewed in the future, and some can be changed if they are not working well for your patient.

- "After starting treatment, we will continue to monitor you to find out how well it is working."
- "Side effects may occur, but if you do have any, they may go away with time or we can try a different medicine or change the dose (amount) you are taking. If you experience any serious problems, contact me or another healthcare professional right away."

D

Decide Which Local Resources Can Support Your Patient

Share resources to support patients, including their cardiovascular care team (e.g. physician, pharmacist, nurse, cardiologist, electrophysiologist, dietitian, and health plan patient navigator). Give contact information for each resource.

References

- The SHARE Approach. Content last reviewed March 2023. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/professional-training/shared-decision/index.html
- 2023 ACC/AHA/ACCP/HRS Guideline for the Diagnosis and Management of Atrial Fibrillation: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Joint Committee on Clinical Practice Guidelines https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIR.0000000000001193#d1e5113

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FOR PATIENTS

To Help Manage Your Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)

What are the signs and symptoms of AFib?

AFib symptoms can come and go. And they can vary. Please tell me or another professional right away if you have one or more of the following symptoms:

- **Irregular heartbeat** (at rest or when active)
- **Heart racing** (fast or fluttering at any time)
- **Chest pain** (sharp or dull)
- **Shortness of breath** (difficulty breathing or tight chest)
- **Fatigue** (consistently feeling tired)
- **Light-headedness** (feeling dizzy or faint)

Why treat AFib?

AFib raises your risk of having a stroke **5x** more likely. Your healthcare team can help you choose options that best meet your needs.

Talk to your doctor about your options for living with AFib. Because AFib is different for every person, you and your clinician can discuss what treatment plan is best for you. A heart-healthy lifestyle can help you live a healthier life with AFib. Your clinician may advise you to take a daily medication to help you reduce stroke risk. Be sure to attend your medical appointments and check your lab results regularly.

Heart-healthy lifestyle
- Heart-healthy diet
- No smoking
- Little to no alcohol
- Regular, moderate-to-vigorous exercise

+

Manage other conditions
- Blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Weight
- Sleep (get tested for sleep apnea)

+

Heart rhythm and rate control

Medication and non-medication options

+

Reduce stroke risk

Medication and non-medication options

Learn more about AFib at:

- CardioSmart: CardioSmart.org/AFib
- CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/about/atrial-fibrillation.html
- Heart Rhythm Alliance: https://heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/us/resources/arrhythmia-alliance-patient-resources
- Million Hearts®: https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/about-million-hearts/optimizing-care/aspirin-anticoagulant-use.html
- PCNA: https://pcna.net/clinical-resources/patient-handouts/atrial-fibrillation-tools-and-handouts/
- Stop AFib: https://www.stopafib.org/managing-afib/

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FOR PATIENTS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

AFib Treatment Planning Worksheet

Visit date: _____

Reason for treatment/Treatment goals	
☐ Irregular heartbeat Frequency: _____	☐ Shortness of breath Frequency: _____
☐ Heart racing Frequency: _____	☐ Fatigue Frequency: _____
☐ Chest pain Frequency: _____	☐ Lightheadedness Frequency: _____

Treatment options	
Lifestyle changes	**Health condition management**
Heart rhythm and rate control	**Reduce stroke risk**

Medication list		
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:
Name:	Dose (amount):	Frequency:

Treatment concerns (e.g. medications, costs):	Treatment plans:

FOR PATIENTS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

AFib Treatment Planning Worksheet (cont'd.)

My Cardiovascular Care Team

Primary care provider	Pharmacist
Phone: Email:	Phone: Email:
Nurse	**Registered dietitian**
Phone: Email:	Phone: Email:
Other specialist e.g., cardiologist	**Health insurance plan navigator**
Phone: Email:	Phone: Email:
Other specialist e.g., electrophysiologist	**Caregiver**
Phone: Email:	Phone: Email:

Screening and Lab Results

Date	Blood pressure	EKG or HR	Hgb/HCT	Total cholesterol	HDL-C	LDL-C	A1C	Creatinine

EKG/HR=electrocardiogram/heart rate; Hgb/HCT=hemoglobin/hematocrit; HDL-C= high-density lipoprotein cholesterol; LDL-C= low-density lipoprotein cholesterol; A1C = hemoglobin A1C

Procedures (e.g. cardioversion, atrial fibrillation ablation, left atrial appendage closure)			
Date	Name of procedure	Performed by	Location