

# Stroke prevention as the cornerstone of AFib treatment



**UpBeat**  
By Heart Rhythm Society

## HOW CAN AFIB CAUSE A STROKE?

The heart has four parts and a signal system that tells each part when to squeeze (contract) and when to relax. When you have AFib, your signals are disorganized, and make two of the heart parts shake instead of fully squeezing.

**Blood can pool in those parts of the heart and form a clot.** A clot is clumped blood that becomes solid.

Clots can break off from their original place and move through your bloodstream. The path of blood from the heart goes to the brain where the clot can get stuck in a blood vessel and block it off. **A blocked blood vessel in the brain can cause a stroke.**

**1 out of every 4 strokes**



## WHAT IS A BLOOD THINNER?

**Blood thinners are medications that keep blood clots from forming or getting bigger.** It is especially important that people who have a higher chance of AFib take blood thinners. Your doctor may prescribe blood thinners for you to prevent blood clots from forming in your vessels and lower your chance of getting a stroke.

You may not need a blood thinner medication right away, but as you get older and your health changes, you may need it in the future. **It is important to continue talking to your doctor about the changes in your health every time you come for a visit.**

## PEOPLE WITH AFIB ARE

**5x**

more likely to have a stroke than those without AFib, and the strokes are worse.

## WHAT ARE THE PLUSES AND MINUSES OF TAKING BLOOD THINNERS?

A few blood thinner medications that you can take as a pill are available for patients with AFib. **The plus is that taking blood thinners in the way your doctor prescribed can significantly lower your chance of stroke due to blood clots.**

**The minus of taking blood thinners is that they may also keep the good clots from forming.** This can make you more likely to bruise or bleed too much. Your doctor will also explain how to tell whether your bleeding (like a nosebleed) is a normal side effect. Your doctor may check your blood to keep track of how the blood thinners are working and might ask you to change some of your activities that can lead to injuries.

Each type of blood thinner, sometimes called anticoagulants, has its own pluses and minuses. **Talk to your doctor about your worries. To make the choice that is right for you, ask your doctor to help you compare the problems a stroke can cause to problems from a bleed from a blood thinner.**