



SENIORCARE OPTIONS

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**Candor. Compassion.
Competence.**

Aging Life Care Management
for the Metro Atlanta Area
Assisting medically frail seniors,
disabled adults, & their caregivers



Atrial Fibrillation – When an irregular heartbeat can have serious consequences!

A well-working heart is a crucial part of our body and our existence. Its primary function is to pump blood through the vessels of our circulatory system – and to provide our bodies with the oxygen and nutrients it needs while helping to remove the waste it doesn't. It is an organ working ceaselessly – beating about 100,000 times a day. It contracts and relaxes – which allows blood to fill its four chambers inside for processing before it is released into the body.

Ideally, the pumping mechanism of one's heart is smooth and regular due to an effective electrical system – but, sometimes the heartbeat can become irregular with age, obesity, family history, or health problems that can affect the system or effectiveness of the heart (such as heart failure, high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism, or COPD).

When the heartbeat isn't strong and steady, blood can pool in the atrium (which is the upper chamber of the heart) potentially leading to clots – which can block blood flow and can lead to a heart attack or stroke. This irregular heartbeat is called Atrial Fibrillation or AFib.

Many do not notice symptoms and only discover the presence of AFib through routine medical checkups with their physician. Others will notice the irregular heart rhythm – which may feel like a fish flopping around or one's heart trying to beat out of their chest. There may also be symptoms including: shortness of breath, weakness, chest pain, dizziness, confusion, lightheadedness, or fainting. When symptoms are observed – it is best to seek immediate medical help.

The physician will take a medical history and perform a physical exam – then, may order blood tests, medical studies to check the heart rhythm, or tests such as an echocardiogram (to see if the heart valves are pumping effectively or of the status of heart failure or attack). They may also order an exercise electrocardiogram (often called a stress test) to check the effectiveness of the arteries supplying blood to your heart.

Once diagnosed, there are multiple courses of treatment depending on the length and severity of the condition. The goal of treatment will be to reduce symptoms and the likelihood of future problems – particularly heart attack and stroke. Treatments are intended to slow the heart rate, control the heart rhythm, and prevent stroke.

Treatments may include medication, lifestyle changes (such as weight loss, not smoking, and increased exercise), procedures such as electrical cardioversion (a low-voltage shock to the heart to return to a normal rhythm), or the installation of a pacemaker.

Due to the seriousness of this diagnosis, it is important that those effected and their caregivers be aware and immediately reactive regarding presenting symptoms of heart attack and stroke.

To briefly review, heart attack symptoms may be chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, and nausea.

Stroke symptoms make include loss of movement in face or extremities, sudden vision changes, weakness, or trouble speaking. Our February newsletter went into much more detail regarding stroke and stroke symptoms. Please review for additional information.

If either are observed, it is often best to seek emergency services immediately! Time is of the essence!

Resources Available

American Heart Association – Watch, Learn, and Live has an interactive cardiovascular library to learn more on a variety of topics.
<http://watchlearnlive.heart.org/>

The American Heart Association also has My AFib Experience which has tools like a symptom tracker and ways to partner with your physician in AFib treatment options and lifestyle changes.
<http://myafibexperience.org/home>

Support Group Information

Lacy Doremus, LMSW, C-ASWCM, facilitates a monthly caregiver support group at 7pm at Presbyterian Village - conference room between Hearthstone and Wellness center. The address is 2000 E West Connector Austell, GA and meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at 7pm.

About SeniorCare Options

SeniorCare Options provides Certified Aging Life Care Management throughout the Metro-Atlanta area. Our team consists of Master's level clinicians in the fields of counseling, social work, therapeutic recreation, and registered nursing. Our backgrounds are vast and specific to the current clinical needs of our clients and their families who may be in transition, have chronic or difficult-to-manage conditions, and who require increased guidance. Our interdisciplinary focus, extensive experience, and heightened sensitivity to their specific needs prove to be an invaluable asset to families faced with the maze of options and care needs. **For more information** regarding Aging Life Care Management services, our support groups, or to inquire about requesting services for someone under your care, **please contact us at: 770-579-9177 or brandih@seniorcareopt.com.**