

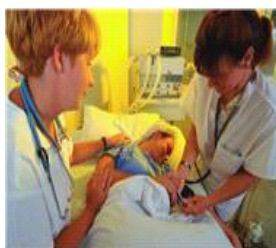
ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS NEWSLETTER

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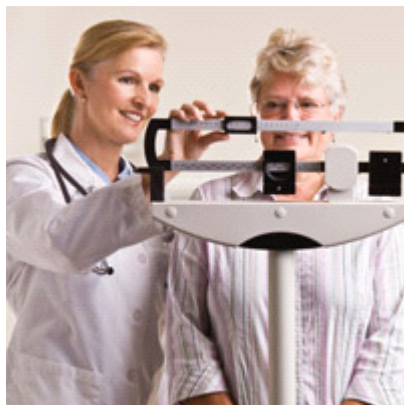
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Weight Loss Tips for Atrial Fibrillation

Being at a healthy weight is an important part of managing atrial fibrillation. Learn about the benefits of weight loss for atrial fibrillation and get tips for success.

By Beth W. Orenstein

Medically reviewed by Farrokh Sohrabi, MD



Atrial fibrillation, a type of irregular heartbeat, is associated with a number of health complications, including high blood pressure and heart failure. But doctors are also learning that the connection between atrial fibrillation and being overweight isn't a coincidence, says Hugh Calkins, MD, an electrophysiologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and president-elect of the Heart Rhythm Society.

Atrial fibrillation, also simply called Afib, causes fatigue, and fatigue decreases your tolerance for **exercise**. You move less, and if you eat the same or more, you gain weight. "It's a vicious cycle," Dr. Calkins says. And being overweight can make

managing atrial fibrillation more difficult.

Besides causing sluggishness and fatigue, being overweight also puts a strain on your heart. "When you're carrying around extra weight, your heart has to work harder to pump blood, especially with activity," says Gene C. Kim, MD, an electrophysiologist at Torrance Memorial Medical Center in Torrance, Calif. When your heart has to work harder, it can weaken and fail.

How Weight Loss Affects Your Heart

Atrial fibrillation already puts you at greater risk for high blood pressure, heart attack, and sleep apnea, all of which can be life-threatening. Being overweight also increases these risks. But following a [heart-healthy lifestyle](#), which includes maintaining a healthy weight, can reduce your chance of developing heart disorders.

And there's another reason to aim for a healthy weight: Afib may or may not become a permanent condition. Researchers at the Group Health Research Institute in Seattle found that people who had a high body mass index were more likely to develop permanent Afib than people with a normal body mass were.

Losing weight can also make atrial fibrillation treatments more effective. A study by researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine found that catheter ablation was more likely to fail as an Afib treatment when people were overweight or obese and had obstructive sleep apnea.

Tips for Weight Loss for Atrial Fibrillation

The key to losing weight is the same whether you have Afib or not. Put these tips to work for you:

Work with your doctor. Your doctor can help you find an exercise and weight loss plan that will work for you and that's appropriate for your heart arrhythmia.

Rebalance calories in, calories out. "To lose weight and achieve a healthy weight, you must burn more calories than you consume," Dr. Kim says. Find a [well-balanced diet](#) that appeals to you and that allows you to eat less, and then exercise to burn more calories, he says.

Choose a weight loss diet that's heart-healthy. At worst, fad diets can be dangerous, and at best, they aren't sustainable over the long term. Diets with low-fat foods, lots of fruit and vegetables, and foods rich in vitamins — such as the Mediterranean diet — are the most effective and practical.

Gradually increase exercise. When you're overweight and have Afib, you may become fatigued easily and have little tolerance for exercise. The key is to start slow to avoid becoming tired and discouraged. Even just a few minutes of movement a day will help get you started, Kim says. Every week, increase your exercise activity by a few minutes. "It can be as easy as walking around the house or to the end of the driveway or to the street corner and back a couple of times a day," Kim says.

Build in small activities to burn extra calories. Adding small increments of activity to your day can help a great deal with managing your weight, Calkins says. Park farther away so that you'll have to walk farther to the entrances of stores and buildings. Take your dog for a walk after dinner. Make more trips to the car to unload groceries rather than carrying them all in at once.

Make permanent changes. For successful weight loss, Kim says, the nutrition and exercise plan you choose has to become a permanent lifestyle change. Resist thinking of a diet as something temporary that you look forward to finishing.

Work out in water. Water exercises are a good option if you're having difficulty walking or doing other exercises. Another option is exercise that's done while lying down or seated. "There are arm and leg exercises that can be done lying on your stomach or back," Kim says. "As movements become easier, add resistance bands or light weights to your routine."

Join a weight-loss group. You don't have to go it alone. Calkins recommends a supervised weight-loss program if you're having trouble shedding pounds on your own. Chances are you'll get the motivation and support you need to stick with your plan and, most important, keep lost pounds from creeping back on.

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