

# Atrial fibrillation and stroke

[stroke.org.nz](https://stroke.org.nz)

➔ Call 0800 78 76 53 or email [help@stroke.org.nz](mailto:help@stroke.org.nz) for free support and guidance.

## About Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand

Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand is the national charity dedicated to stroke prevention and improving outcomes for stroke survivors and their whānau. The generosity of individuals allows us to provide every aspect of our life-changing services.

If you want to find out more about donating or fundraising to help protect the lives of people living in your community, please call **0800 45 99 54** or email [fundraising@stroke.org.nz](mailto:fundraising@stroke.org.nz).



## What is atrial fibrillation?

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) is a heart rhythm problem. When a person has AF, the electrical signals near the heart's natural pacemaker become irregular. AF also prevents the two smaller chambers of the heart – the atria – from contracting properly. This creates a risk of blood clots forming within this part of the heart.

Sometimes people with AF may be aware that their heartbeat feels erratic or fast. However, a person can have the condition and not notice any symptoms.

Anyone of any age can have AF but it is much more common in older people.

## What is a stroke?

Most strokes happen when a clot blocks the flow of blood to the brain. This results in the affected part of the brain being starved of oxygen and begin to be damaged. A less common cause of stroke is when a blood vessel bursts and bleeds into your brain.

A stroke can be fatal or cause long term disability. It can affect your ability to walk, talk, eat, see, read and do many other things that you were able to do before the stroke.

## Atrial fibrillation and stroke – what's the connection?

People who have AF are five times more likely to have a stroke than those who do not.

This is because blood clots can form in the heart when it is not contracting properly and travel to the brain, causing a stroke.



## Keeping in rhythm and preventing stroke

There are plenty of ways to manage and treat AF.

### 1. Check your heart rhythm (pulse).

Everyone over the age of 65 should have an annual pulse check or, if you identify as Māori or Pasifika and are over the age of 55, you should have your pulse checked each year.

### 2. Make lifestyle changes.

- Be smokefree
- Sit less, move more
- Keep alcohol intake low
- Eat mostly fresh, unprocessed foods
- Manage stress levels
- Get enough sleep

### 3. Treat AF and any related conditions.

A variety of medications and procedures are available to help control AF. If you have AF, a doctor will advise the best treatment for you.

### TODAY YOUR HEART RHYTHM WAS:

Date:

My heart rhythm reading:

☐ normal ☐ possible AF ☐ other

Based on your reading today you have been advised to get your heart rhythm rechecked by a doctor:

☐ within 1–2 weeks ☐ in 12 months