



information

## Atrial fibrillation ablation

### *Discharge instructions*

*If you have questions that are not answered by these instructions, please call your nurse or doctor.*

You recently underwent a catheter ablation for atrial fibrillation. The procedure is also known as pulmonary vein isolation (PVI). This procedure attempts to correct your irregular heart rhythm. The success of the procedure depends on many factors and the success rate ranges from approximately 70-80%. Many patients may need more than one procedure to reach success.

The first six to eight weeks is called the “healing” phase. During this time, it is not uncommon to experience episodes of atrial fibrillation. If this happens, you should not be discouraged and you should not assume that your procedure was unsuccessful. The ablation procedure causes inflammation of the heart tissue around the pulmonary veins which may cause more atrial fibrillation. However, as the area heals, the episodes of atrial fibrillation related to the procedure should go away. You will be monitored closely with a home heart rhythm monitor after the ablation. You should call the office with any questions.

At the end of the healing phase, your doctor will discuss the results of the ablation with you and will talk with you about the need for any future treatment.

#### **What is my activity level after the procedure?**

During the procedure, catheters were placed into your blood vessels near the groin. These catheters were removed at the end of the procedure, leaving a small puncture site. The puncture site usually heals quickly. However, there is a small chance of bleeding from the puncture site. Here is some information and guidelines to follow as your groin heals.

- You should not drive for 48 hours after the procedure.
- **For at least one week**, you should not lift, push, or pull anything heavier than 10 pounds or do any exercise that causes you to hold your breath and bear down with your abdominal muscles.
- One week after the procedure, you may resume your regular activities, including sexual activity.
- After one week, we suggest that you begin your exercise program at half your usual routine for the first few days, then gradually work back to your full routine.
- You should not take a tub bath or swim until the puncture site is healed. This

usually takes about a week.

- You may remove the Band-Aid over your puncture site and shower tomorrow.
- You may notice a small bruise around the puncture site. This is normal and will go away in 1-2 weeks.
- Ask your doctor when you may go back to work. This will depend on the type of work you do.
- **Get help right away if you notice:**
  - ✓ fresh bleeding (press hard on the area for at least 15 minutes while calling for help)
  - ✓ pain, swelling, redness at the puncture site
  - ✓ fever of 101 or more

### **What medications do I take after the procedure?**

You should go back to taking all medications you were taking before the procedure unless your doctor has told you about a change. Be sure your doctor knows about everything you were taking at home, including prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.

Blood-thinning medications – such as warfarin (Coumadin), aspirin, Plavix – are very important because they help prevent a stroke; they should not be stopped. Also, a new medication may be started for your heart rhythm while you are in the hospital based on the findings during the procedure.

If needed, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) every six hours for pain in the area where the catheter was placed. If pain is not relieved with acetaminophen, contact your doctor. Never take more than the recommended dose of Tylenol.

You will receive an updated medication list from your nurse before you are discharged from the hospital. If there are any questions regarding your medications, you should call the office immediately.

### **What symptoms should I expect?**

After the procedure, your heart will probably be in a normal rhythm. Many patients feel much better after the procedure than they did before. As noted, your atrial fibrillation may return briefly because of inflammation related to the procedure.

Please follow these guidelines if you experience symptoms following your ablation procedure:

- If you think your atrial fibrillation has returned but you do not feel ill, please let us know by calling the office during regular business hours (617-667-8800).

- Please **get help right away** if you feel:
  - severe palpitations, or palpitations accompanied by feeling ill
  - shortness of breath
  - chest pain
  - fainting or feeling faint
  - numbness/weakness
  - vision changes
  - slurred speech
  - any other symptom that concerns you

### **What testing will I have after the procedure?**

You will wear a heart monitor several times during the first year after the ablation. This allows us to see how long your heart remains in the normal rhythm. You will also have an MRI or CT scan to examine your pulmonary veins.

### **When will I see the doctor again?**

You should make an appointment to see your doctor within one month of the procedure. Call the office if you feel you should be seen sooner.

*Note: You underwent a procedure performed under fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance. Fluoroscopy is a type of medical imaging that shows a series of x-ray images on a monitor, much like an x-ray movie. The amount of radiation used depended on many factors, including your body size and the level of complexity encountered during the procedure. Procedures involving a greater amount of radiation that may result in some changes to the skin. Although most patients do not develop any problems, we want to remind you that this procedure may cause injury to the exposed skin and hair. These effects may be increased if you have had previous radiation exposure to the same skin area, particularly within the past twelve months. Radiation injury to the area of exposed skin can take many forms, including redness, blistering, loss of the hair over the skin, and breakdown of skin. These effects can appear after a few weeks or even after several months. Please remind your primary care provider to examine your skin periodically over the next 12 months for evidence of radiation injury, as skin changes may not appear immediately. If at any time you notice changes to your skin, please contact us 617-667-8800 to arrange further evaluation.*