

Patient Education - Medications and Procedures for AFib

The goals of treatment for atrial fibrillation are to prevent blood clots, restore normal heart rate, and restore normal heart rhythm. There are medications to help reduce blood clots as well as control the body's heart rate and rhythm.



Medications that help to reduce blood clots are called anticoagulants because they block a substance that your blood needs to clot. There are two types of anticoagulants:

- Vitamin K antagonists (VKAs) such as **warfarin**. These agents block your body's ability to make vitamin K which is needed to create a clot. These agents are highly effective but require significant monitoring from your doctor and dietary restrictions from you.
- Novel oral anticoagulants (NOACs) reduce blood clotting without blocking vitamin K and do not require the stringent monitoring or dietary restrictions needed by VKAs. The NOACs include **apixaban, dabigatran, edoxaban** and **rivaroxaban** and have been shown to be effective in preventing blood clots and improving quality of care.

There are also medications to control heart rate and/or heart rhythm. Medications controlling heart rate lower the heart rate and regulate the electrical impulses from the atria to the ventricles. Examples include **sotalol**. Medications that control heart rhythm strive to keep the heartbeat patterns normal. Examples include **dofetilide** and **amiodarone**.



Sometimes medications are not enough to restore the heart rhythm, or they may have intolerable side effects. In those cases, medical procedures may be necessary to help regulate the heart's rhythm. Common procedures include:

- **Cardioversion** involves sending an electrical impulse on the outside of the chest to re-establish normal heart rhythm.
- **Ablation** involves purposefully destroying the cardiac tissue responsible for the arrhythmia in an attempt to restore a normal sinus rhythm.
- A **pacemaker** is a small electrical device implanted in the body with wires to the heart to regulate heartbeat.

For more information about the various medications and procedures to treat atrial fibrillation, please contact your healthcare provider.

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