When Your Heart Skips a Beat

We’re not talking about the way your heart feels when your team scores—we’re talking about atrial fibrillation, when your heart is literally thrown off its normal rhythm.

This dangerous condition affects more than 2 million Americans, and many of them don’t realize it. What’s worse, individuals with atrial fibrillation are at five times the risk of stroke as those with a normal rhythm. “That’s the most real and present danger,” says Ali Kizilbash, MD, a cardiac electrophysiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. Here, Dr. Kizilbash answers key questions about “a-fib.”

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

“The most common would be a feeling of skipped, rapid or irregular heartbeats, chest pain, shortness of breath, dizzy spells or lack of energy.”

HOW IS IT TREATED?

“Treatment for atrial fibrillation is directed towards accomplishing three things: preventing stroke, regulating heart rate and maintaining that normal rhythm,” Dr. Kizilbash says. “For suitable candidates, we may also perform a cardiac ablation, which uses a catheter to essentially correct the electrical channels or pathways causing the problem.”

If you’ve experienced any symptoms of a-fib, see your doctor. A simple, noninvasive test can determine whether you have it, and early treatment could save your life.

CARDIOVASCULAR RISK ASSESSMENT

Learn more at BaylorHealth.com/Heart
Gary Goodman was on a hunting trip in the mountains of Montana in November 2009 when he had a massive heart attack—without even knowing it. “I had pain between my shoulder blades,” recalls the Southlake, Texas, executive. “It felt like I threw my back out.”

Goodman, who was 50 at the time, continued his day of hiking and horseback riding trying to move through the pain. It wasn’t until the next morning when he visited a local hospital that he learned what had happened. From there, he was airlifted to another hospital, where he had a stent placed before returning home.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

Once back in Southlake, Goodman embarked on a return to the Wild by embarking on a massive heart attack knocked this outdoorsman on his heels—today he’s stronger than ever.

Gary Goodman, who was 50 at the time, continued his exercise schedule and works closely with his cardiologist. “With great follow-up, compliance and a great attitude, heart attack patients really can do amazing recovery,” Dr. Theleman says. “Those folks truly love what they do,” Goodman says. “They weren’t just punching the clock; they were invested in me.”

Today, Goodman is even more vigilant about managing and monitoring his high LDL cholesterol or smoking. “For patients with severe damage to the heart, this device acts as a backup plan,” says Kevin Theleman, MD, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Grapevine. “When combined with medication, it can allow them to live a functional, normal life.”

HAPPY TRAILS

Just six months after his ordeal, Goodman was able to return to normal activities. He credits the team at Baylor Cardiac Rehabilitation with his impressive recovery. “Those folks truly love what they do,” Goodman says. “They weren’t just punching the clock; they were invested in me.”

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Gary Goodman has made a full recovery and even went on the same expedition the following year.

Be Proactive About Heart Attack Symptoms

As men, we know we’re built differently than the women in our lives—inside and out. So it’s no surprise that our heart attack symptoms are unique, too. Here, Sukesh Burjonroppa, MD, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor All Saints Medical Center, shares the symptoms most commonly associated with each gender.

MEN

• Fullness, general discomfort or a dull ache on the right side of the chest
• Crushing, squeezing pain on either side of the chest that may be constant, come and go, or radiate to other parts of the body
• Shortness of breath, dizziness or fatigue
• Nausea or indigestion
• Chills, sweating, weak pulse or cold, clammy skin

WOMEN

• Pressure or fullness in the chest
• Crushing, squeezing pain on the right or left side that may be constant or come and go, and may radiate to the neck, one or both arms, shoulders or jaw
• Throat discomfort
• Shortness of breath, dizziness or fatigue
• Nausea or vomiting
• Chills, sweating, weak pulse or cold, clammy skin

Remember, everyone experiences a heart attack differently. The important thing is that you listen to your body and act on your instincts.

“My heart attack is the one that causes the most damage—or kills you,” Dr. Burjonroppa says. “To prevent that first attack, men should be proactive about any symptoms that seem out of the ordinary. If you’re experiencing any of these symptoms, seek medical attention.”

Are You at Risk for Heart Disease?

To take a heart disease risk assessment, visit BaylorHealth.com/Heart. For a physician referral to a cardiologist, call 1.800.4BAYLOR.

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