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The heart is integral to the circulatory system in human beings and is a muscular organ which is perhaps the reason why it is susceptible to a lot of disorders especially as the ageing process proceeds. The heart pumps blood without any rest whatsoever and this leads to a strain in the muscles of the heart and that is where a condition called atrial fibrillation results. It is one of the most common disorders of the heart that is often observed in a majority of the elderly population. This condition can be diagnosed by your general practitioner during regular checkups.

Atrial fibrillation is one of the most common cardiac arrhythmia and which affects more than 1.5 million Americans, which is drastic. The primary characteristic of atrial fibrillation is a sudden and irregular heartbeat. The incidence of atrial fibrillation shows a significant increase beyond the age of 50 years. This condition is more common among men than among women. Atrial fibrillation may be chronic or intermittent and may be triggered by an underlying heart disease such as mitral valve prolapse or stenosis, coronary artery disease, hypertensive heart disease, a heart attack or an inflammation of the membrane surrounding the heart (pericarditis).

1. Causes,

Atrial fibrillation causes poor blood flow to the body. During atrial fibrillation, the heart's two upper chambers (the atria) beat irregularly â€" out of coordination with the two lower chambers (the ventricles) of the heart. Attacks of atrial fibrillation can come and go, or you may have chronic atrial fibrillation. Although atrial fibrillation isn't life-threatening, it is a serious medical condition that sometimes requires emergency treatment. Treatments for atrial fibrillation may include medications and other interventions to try to alter the heart's electrical system.

2. Symptoms

â€¢ Uncontrolled beating of heart without any coordination

â€¢ Pulse may feel rapid or it can feel too slow

â€¢ Dizziness occurs

â€¢ Fainting results

â€¢ Confusion

â€¢ Fatigue or tiredness results

â€¢ Shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing

â€¢ Sensation of rigidness in the chest

3. Signs and tests

Listening to the heart beats with a stethoscope gives us a clear idea of beating of heart in a irregular manner. The pulse may feel rapid, irregular, or both. Sometimes the pulse is too slow. The normal heart rate is 60 to 100, but in atrial fibrillation the heart rate may be 100 to 175. Blood pressure may be normal or low.

To determine the presence of underlying heart diseases there are tests which may include:

â€¢ an echocardiogram

â€¢ Nuclear imaging tests

â€¢ Coronary angiography

â€¢ An exercise treadmill ECG

â€¢ An electrophysiologic study (EP study) may be needed in some cases

4. Treatment

The treatment of atrial fibrillation is directed toward the prevention of thromboembolism, control of the ventricular rate and conversion to sinus rhythm. Most people who suffer from atrial fibrillation need more than one type of treatment. Treatment options may include nonsurgical procedures, medications, medical devices such as pacemakers, or surgical procedures. Medications (anti-arrhythmics) are prescribed to restore normal sinus rhythm. The medications effectively maintain sinus rhythm for at least one year in about half of the patients treated. However, atrial fibrillation medications can cause side effects such as nausea and fatigue. Many other natural supplements such as fish oils which are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids are good for heart. Intake of magnesium, vitamin-C, lipolic acid etc. can also prove beneficial.

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