

# Health Awareness



## Irregular Heartbeat: Your Medicine Matters

(NAPS)—More than 2.5 million Americans have atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that disrupts the flow of blood through the heart. Atrial fibrillation (AF) can cause blood clots to form and lead to a stroke.

Blood thinning medications, also known as anti-coagulants, stop clots from forming and can mean the difference between life and death. Unfortunately, some people with AF still don't take these life-saving medications as prescribed, putting themselves at significantly increased risk for a stroke.

"The reasons why people don't take these medications as prescribed can vary," explains Gary Raskob, PhD, Dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and Chair of the Medical & Scientific Advisory Board of the National Blood Clot Alliance (NBCA). "For example, they may not realize how important it is to take the medicine, they may not receive clear direction from their doctor, they may be concerned about certain side effects, or they may simply forget to take it routinely."

According to Dr. Raskob, there are blood thinning medications, such as warfarin, that have been prescribed for decades. These older therapies require routine blood



**People with atrial fibrillation (AF) who don't take their medication can put themselves at increased risk for a stroke.**

tests and can interact with other medications and certain foods.

Newer blood thinning medications introduced in recent years don't require blood testing, have fewer drug interactions, and can be taken without special dietary considerations. Both older and newer blood thinners effectively prevent blood clots and reduce the risk of clot-provoked stroke. "It's crucial for AF patients and their doctors to share information about any problems the patient might be having with their blood thinning medication and make sure that these important therapies are taken properly to prevent stroke," says Dr. Raskob.

For more information about blood clots and stroke, and tips about communicating effectively with your doctor, visit NBCA's website at [www.stoptheclot.org](http://www.stoptheclot.org).