

AFib Awareness Month Aims To Educate On Key Stroke Risk

(NAPSA)—An irregular heartbeat, called atrial fibrillation or AFib, increases your risk of stroke by five times—but there are steps you can take. AFib affects more than 2.7 million Americans, many over age 60. To help, during September, National AFib Awareness Month, the American Heart Association is teaching those at highest risk how to spot and manage AFib to avoid stroke.

“AFib can have symptoms such as an irregular-feeling heartbeat, shortness of breath and light-headedness, or it can have no symptoms at all,” says Patrick T. Ellinor, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Cardiac Arrhythmia Service at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Stroke risks are increased because when the heart is in AFib, it is not moving blood effectively. Blood pools and clots can form. When the clot is pumped out of the heart, it can travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

That’s what happened to Carl Romero of New Jersey. Four years ago, while working out with his son, Romero, now 48, experienced an erratic heartbeat and pounding in his chest. That led him to his doctors, who diagnosed him with AFib. Seven months later, he went on to have a stroke. The experience opened his eyes about the need for major lifestyle changes.

“This forced me to really be conscious of my AFib and take



If you ever have an irregular heartbeat, see your doctor. Help is available.

note of what I was putting in my body and how it was affecting me,” Romero said. “Be empowered to do the things you can do. Changing diet isn’t a doctor’s decision—it’s the patient’s.”

Hypertension, heart disease, diabetes and heart failure are major risk factors for AFib. If you suspect you have AFib, meet with your doctor. AFib can be managed, helping you avoid stroke and live a longer, healthier life. Because AFib can be tricky to find, it may also be an underlying condition in cryptogenic stroke patients.

To access resources, visit www.heart.org/afibawareness. For those living with atrial fibrillation, the American Heart Association and StopAFib.org have developed resources, including a symptom tracker, tips for dealing with AFib in all areas of your life, and a community of survivors at www.MyAFibExperience.org.

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