

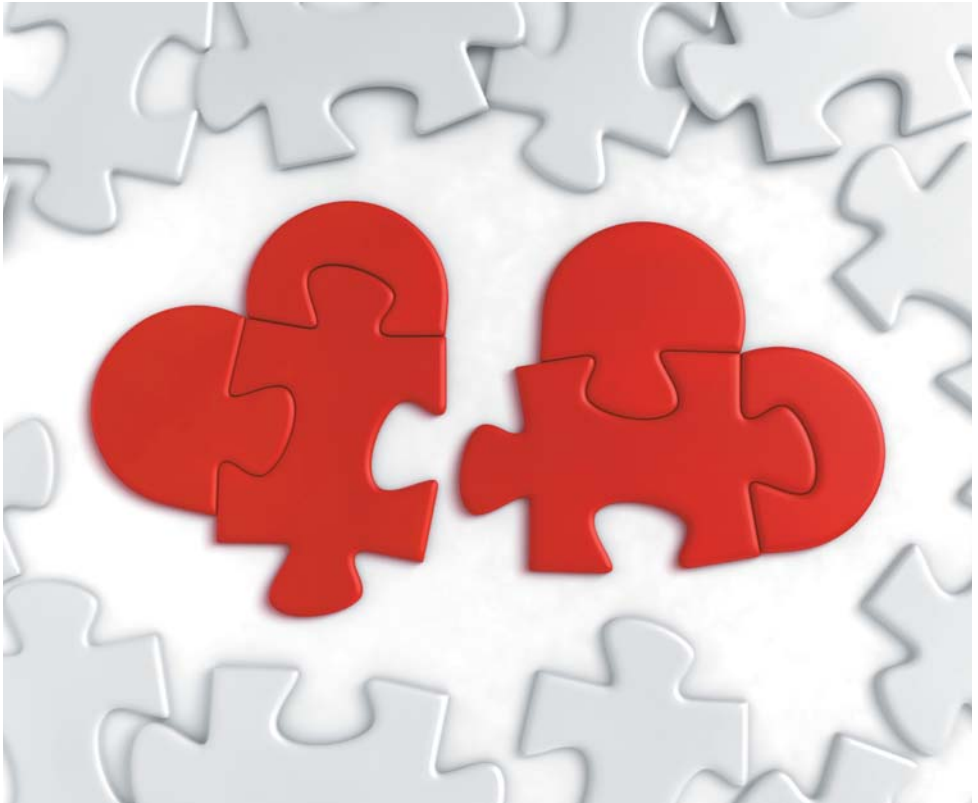


atrialfibrillationassociation

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Providing information, support and access to  
established, new or innovative treatments for Atrial Fibrillation

## **Living with Atrial Fibrillation: RELATIONSHIPS**



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# Atrial Fibrillation and Sex

## Let's talk about sex

A diagnosis of AF can be a dramatic event and often comes as a shock. It can also cause changes in how we think and behave.

Sometimes, these changes can be a good thing – like eating more healthily – at other times, our thoughts and feelings can be unhelpful and this is certainly the case in relation to sexual activity.

People who have experienced heart problems can often worry about having sex. We know that people often reduce or stop having sex because they are frightened it may bring on further heart problems.

Take Dave, for example. He described to his doctor how he believed that having sex could be risky and even lead to death!

## Dave's thoughts

“Having sex is bad for me” “I have to avoid it”

“There is a risk I could get too excited and it could kill me!”

Such thoughts led to Dave feeling worried and anxious about having sex. So what did he do?

Yes, you've guessed it. He avoided any intimacy and sexual contact with his wife.

But.....this also led to him feeling fed-up. He started having thoughts about being “past it” and “no longer a man”.

Dave's wife also started to feel rejected and upset that an important part of their relationship was now ‘lost’.

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## Was Dave right to have these thoughts and to respond by stopping sex?

While we can understand what happened to Dave (it may also be happening to you too), what we DO know is that, for most people with all sorts of heart problems, having sex is safe and indeed recommended by doctors!

Think of it this way, for the average person, male or female, having sex puts the same amount of work on the heart as a steady 20 minute walk. Having an orgasm is the same as walking up some stairs.

The bottom line is that exercise is good for the heart and sexual activity is just another form of exercise.

So – **opposite** to peoples worrying thoughts and fears - regular sexual activity can actually be **good** for our hearts!

## Have you discovered you have worries and fears about having sex?

Have you reduced or stopped having sex as a result of these worries and fears?

Read on for more information about how to manage this.

### Dave's Story continued:

Dave realised that his worries and fears were starting to have a big impact on his relationship, how he felt about himself and his life in general.

Dave's doctor advised that the first step in overcoming this challenge was to get hold of the **correct information**.

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## The correct information about sex

Sex has cardiovascular benefits

Sex helps increase blood flow; increased heart rate and deep breathing improves circulation.

Fresh blood supply soaks organs and muscles with fresh oxygen and hormones, and as used blood is removed, so too are waste products.

The exercise of sex lowers cholesterol and more importantly it tips the HDL/ LDL (good/bad) cholesterol balance towards the healthier HDL side.

Sex relieves stress

Having sex lowers blood pressure and causes overall stress reduction. Science shows there is a link between partner hugs and lower blood pressure in women!

Sex boosts the immune system

Having sex has been linked with higher levels of an antibody (called immunoglobulin A) which can protect us from getting colds and other infections.

<p>Sex burns calories</p>	<p>Thirty minutes of sex burns 85 calories or more. Here's how that matches up to other activities that you may have been advised to start: yoga 114 calories per half hour, dancing 29, walking 153.</p>
<p>Sex boosts self-esteem and improves intimacy</p>	<p>We can start to feel better about ourselves and our relationships. Having sex and orgasms increases levels of a hormone (oxytocin) the so-called "love hormone", which helps us bond and build trust.</p>
<p>Sex reduces pain</p>	<p>As the hormone oxytocin is released, our bodies "natural pain killers" (endorphins) increase, and pain reduces.</p>
<p>Sex reduces prostate cancer risk for men and strengthens pelvic floor muscles for women</p>	<p>Frequent ejaculations have been shown to reduce risk of prostate cancer later in life.</p> <p>For women, pelvic floor muscle exercises during sex offers two main benefits – it allows greater pleasure and also strengthens the area and helps to minimise the risk of incontinence later in life.</p> <p>How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises: tighten the muscles of your pelvic floor, as if you're trying to stop the flow of urine. Count to three, then release.</p>

Sex helps you relax more and sleep better

The deep relaxation that typically follows sex may be one of the few times people actually allow themselves to completely let go, surrender and relax.

The hormone oxytocin released during orgasm also promotes sleep; and getting enough sleep has been linked with a host of other benefits, such as maintaining a healthy weight and blood pressure.

Knowing the correct information helped Dave to overcome his worries and concerns about having sex again.

Of course this took a little time while he re-built his confidence but by checking his thoughts and feelings and talking to his doctor when needed, Dave did go back to having a loving and satisfying sexual relationship with his wife.

If you don't feel confident about having sex and/or if you still have any worries or concerns about having sex following a diagnosis of AF, please take a minute to discuss this with your doctor.

The topic of sex can be difficult for patients to talk about but remember that your doctor and nurses are used to talking about these things and in fact would welcome questions to allow you to get the information and advice you need.

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Please remember these are general guidelines  
and individuals should always discuss  
their condition with their own doctor.

