

## Reducing Stress may Help Manage Atrial Fibrillation

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A recent report by the American College of Cardiology explored the connection between stress and atrial fibrillation (AF) and whether targeted stress reduction could be an effective intervention for the condition.

The paper was published in *JACC: Clinical Electrophysiology* and the lead author was Peter Kistler, MBBS, PhD, head of Clinical Electrophysiology Research at Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, Australia.

In the review, scientists sought to better understand how reduced stress could improve the management of AF, a type of abnormal heartbeat which can lead to blood clots, stroke, and heart failure. The authors acknowledged that although there's mounting evidence that associates stress with poor health outcomes, so far, the connection has been nonspecific. To better define the relationship between stress and AF, researchers analyzed studies which focused on how acute and chronic stress can lead to AF, the effects stress has on heart health, measurements of stress, and how stress responses differ between males and females.

The study's authors determined that the relationship between stress and AF is bidirectional. According to the report, stress can induce AF by negatively affecting the immune and automatic nervous system. Chronic stress can also lead to weight gain, substance use, and a decreased physical activity, which all increase the risk of AF.

“Stress begets AFib and AFib begets stress, Kistler said in a statement. “When we are managing AFib patients, clinicians tend to focus on the physical symptoms of AFib and not fully consider both baseline and evolving mental health consequences of having a heart rhythm disorder.”

To conclude, the authors indicate that stress management in the form of anti-depressants, mindfulness therapy, and yoga may be effective tools to both prevent AF and help manage the condition.

“By recognizing stress as a potentially modifiable risk factor in these patients builds on a more holistic approach to AFib management,” Kistler said. “As such, targeted stress reduction may improve symptom perception and outcomes for patients with AF.”

This paper indicates that there are associations between stress and AF and suggests that stress management tools have the potential to improve AF patient outcomes. Further research is needed to determine specific interventions for targeting stress relief as it relates to AF.

**About the Author:** Avery St. Onge



Avery St. Onge is the Associate Editor of Integrative Practitioner. She’s a recent graduate from The George Washington University where she studied journalism and mass communications. During her time at GWU, she focused her reporting on health and wellness. She wrote articles and produced podcasts and videos about topics such as technological advancements in medicine and flaws within college health centers. As a Type 1 diabetic, she is hyperaware of the benefits of a holistic, mind/body approach to medical treatments and is committed to sharing the latest news in integrative medicine.