

# Understanding Catheter Ablation for Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)



**UpBeat**  
By Heart Rhythm Society

## WHAT IS CATHETER ABLATION?

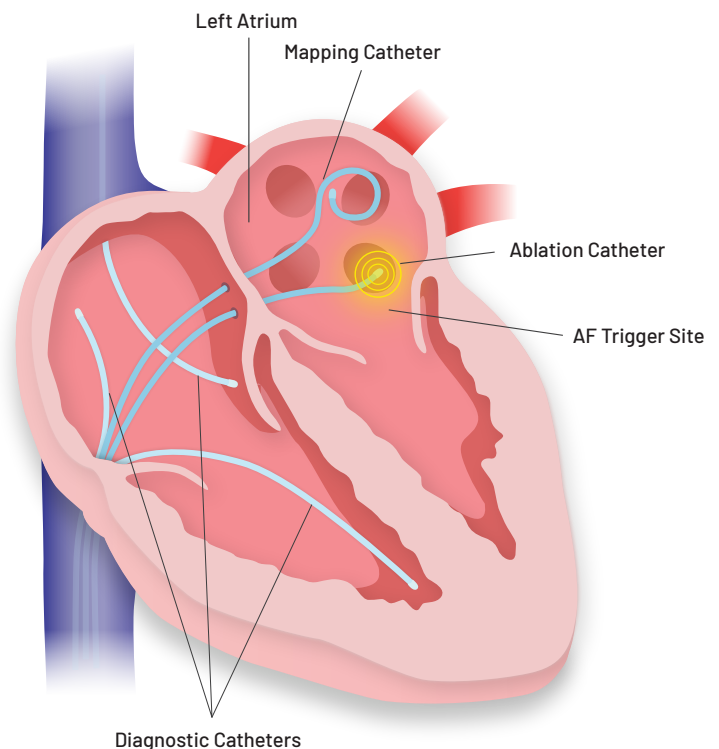
Catheter ablation is a minimally invasive procedure used to treat atrial fibrillation (AFib). It is often recommended when symptoms of AFib are present even though medications or other procedures, like cardioversion, have been used to try to keep your heart in normal rhythm. For some patients, it may be suggested as the first line of treatment. The goal of the procedure is to reduce the amount of AFib by applying energy to small areas of heart tissue, blocking the abnormal electrical signals that cause AFib.

## THE ABLATION TEAM AND SETTING

The procedure is performed in a clinical setting by a team of trained healthcare providers led by a heart rhythm specialist known as an electrophysiologist (EP). The ablation typically takes about 2 to 3 hours to complete.

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE PROCEDURE

- 1 PREPARATION**  
You will receive intravenous (IV) medication to help you relax. Many patients fall asleep during the procedure.
- 2 CATHETER INSERTION**  
Your doctor will numb an area in your groin and make a few small punctures. Flexible tubes, called catheters, are then carefully guided through a blood vessel up into your heart.
- 3 MAPPING THE HEART**  
The doctor uses a special software mapping system to locate the precise areas in your heart that are causing the abnormal electrical signals of AFib.
- 4 APPLYING ENERGY**  
Once the target tissue is identified, the doctor applies energy to create a small scar. This scar tissue blocks the faulty electrical signals.



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## TYPES OF ABLATION ENERGY

Your doctor will choose the best type of energy for your specific needs. The types include:

### THERMAL (TEMPERATURE-BASED) ENERGY:

- o **Radiofrequency Ablation**  
Uses heat to create the scar.
- o **Cryoablation**  
Uses extreme cold to freeze the tissue.

### NON-THERMAL ENERGY:

- o **Pulsed Field Ablation (PFA)**  
Uses short, high-energy electrical pulses instead of temperature.

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## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE PROCEDURE?

### IMMEDIATE RECOVERY

Once the ablation is finished, the catheters are removed. A healthcare provider will apply pressure or use a small stitch to the insertion site in your groin to prevent bleeding. You will need to lie flat for several hours in a recovery room.

### HOSPITAL STAY

Many patients can go home the same day, while others may need to stay in the hospital overnight for observation.

### MEDICATIONS

Your doctor will let you know if you need to start or continue any medications, such as a blood thinner.

### AT-HOME RECOVERY

Most people can return to their normal activities within a few days.



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## RESULTS AND LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP

Most people experience fewer AFib symptoms and an improved quality of life after an ablation.

Your doctor may ask you to wear a heart rhythm monitor (like a patch) or recommend an implantable cardiac monitor to assess how much AFib, if any, remains after the procedure. Sometimes, AFib can continue or come back. If this happens, your EP may recommend repeating the procedure or exploring other treatment options with you.