

# Atrial fibrillation associated with increased risk of death and cardiovascular events in women

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Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) have found that among women who are mostly healthy, those diagnosed with atrial fibrillation have an increased risk of death when compared to women without atrial fibrillation. These findings are published in the May 25, 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"We knew that atrial fibrillation was associated with an increase risk of death in most cases, but in this study we found that even in a population of women who were mostly healthy and did not have established cardiovascular disease, the diagnosis of atrial fibrillation increased the incidence of death by about 2 fold," said Christine Albert, MD, a cardiac electrophysiologist at BWH and senior author of the paper. "Although the risk of death was elevated, the absolute risk of death among the women with AF in this healthy population was relatively low.

Researchers monitored more than 34,000 women participating in the Women's Health Study for approximately 15 years. The women were primarily white and over the age of 45. During that time period, 1,011 women developed atrial fibrillation. Approximately 2.1 percent of the deaths in the entire population could be attributed to the development of atrial fibrillation. Researchers also found that women with atrial fibrillation experienced a higher risk of cardiovascular events such as heart attack, stroke and [congestive heart failure](#). In fact, much of the elevation in risk of death could be explained by the development of these potentially preventable and treatable medical conditions.

"Some of these deaths may be preventable through available therapies including [anticoagulation](#) and [blood pressure control](#). What this means for women with atrial fibrillation is that it

is very important to optimally manage risk factors for cardiovascular disease with the help of their physician. However, there is also a portion of this increased risk that persists even when these [cardiovascular conditions](#) are taken into account. For this reason, more research is needed to further understand the causes of atrial fibrillation so that we might identify ways to prevent atrial fibrillation and death associated with it." Albert said.

**More information:** JAMA. 2011;305[20]2080-2087.

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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