

NATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE

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More than one in three Australians with an irregular heartbeat experience four or more symptoms before visiting a doctor: new research shows

Experts championing greater heart health awareness, education and action

More than one in three (34%) Australians aged 50 and above living with the most common, sustained heart rhythm disorder – atrial fibrillation (AF)¹⁻³ – wait until experiencing four or more symptoms before seeking medical advice, new research reveals.⁴

More than half a million Australians have AF⁵ – a lifelong, progressive disease⁶ where faulty electrical signals of the heart cause the top chambers of the heart known as the atria, to beat faster, erratically,^{7,8} and out of rhythm with the heart's lower two chambers, the ventricles.³ Other AF symptoms include chest tightness, fatigue, shortness of breath and dizziness,^{6,9} noting 30% to 40% of those affected may show no symptoms at all.¹⁰

According to Cardiologist and Electrophysiologist, Queensland Cardiovascular Group, Dr Tomos Walters, Brisbane, the burden and prevalence of this serious, life-compromising disease^{4,11} is often underestimated because many (30% to 40%) may not display visible symptoms, which makes diagnosis challenging.¹

"While many Australian adults claim to understand various factors affecting their heart health,⁴ concerningly, the new research reveals 34% wait until experiencing four or more AF symptoms before seeking medical advice.⁴

"The underestimation of disease prevalence,¹ combined with low community awareness,⁴ and 30% to 40% of patients showing no obvious AF symptoms,¹⁰ is creating the "perfect storm" for one of the largest, and most pressing public health epidemics,"¹²⁻¹⁴ said Dr Walters.

"Furthermore, AF cases in those aged 55 and above are projected to double over the next two decades,¹ driven by our ageing population and rising rates of excess weight and obesity.¹⁰

"People living with AF face a threefold increased risk of heart failure, nearly five times the likelihood of having a stroke, and double the risk of developing dementia,"^{10,15} Dr Walters said.

"Early diagnosis and intervention is therefore crucial for effective management¹⁶ and reducing the risk of these potentially life-threatening complications."^{10,15}

The new research reveals one in three (31%) Australians living with AF report a 'moderate to severe' decline in their quality of life, and ability to perform daily activities.⁴

Moreover, only 31% feel motivated to pursue a more proactive approach to their heart health, even after learning about the heightened risk of stroke, underscoring the urgent need for greater community education and awareness of AF.⁴

"More than three-quarters (77%) of Australians living with AF, or its symptoms, report feeling 'anxious' or 'worried', with 13% experiencing 'severe' anxiety due to the chronic disease,"⁴ said Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist at Monash Heart, Dr Emily Kotschet, Melbourne.

"Studies show depression or anxiety can worsen AF symptoms, reduce quality of life, and increase the likelihood of AF recurrence."¹⁷

"Mental and emotional stress can affect the heart, with studies suggesting anxiety may trigger heart arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat) like AF.¹⁸ This highlights the need for improved disease awareness and a more proactive approach to detection and diagnosis," Dr Kotschet said.

"While physical inactivity is also a known risk factor for AF, the new research reveals nearly 72% of those living with the disease report it affects their ability to stay active,⁴ which may make the problem worse.

"It is crucial for all Australians aged 50 and above to stay active. Regular physical activity may significantly reduce the burden of AF, lower the risk of heart disease, and better manage other health problems,"¹⁹⁻²¹ said Dr Kotschet.

"Doing some form of exercise every day can significantly improve your health outcomes."

Despite many Australians regularly monitoring their heart health⁴ – through blood pressure checks (58%), electrocardiograms (41%), and heart auscultations [listening for an abnormal heart beat] (34%)⁴ – one in three (31%) still feel unsure about recognising heart-related symptoms and when to seek medical advice.⁴

CEO and Founder of the national heart disease advocacy group, [hearts4heart](#), Tanya Hall, Perth, said her personal experience with AF inspired her to create an organisation dedicated to raising awareness of the disease, and ensuring patients are educated about available treatments.

"Living with AF took a significant toll on my life. It affected my ability to work, socialise, and my mental health.

"With timely diagnosis, supportive networks, and the right treatment however, I've been able to live well with AF, and lead a fulfilling life," Tanya said.

"However, awareness of AF remains alarmingly low among the general population, including the elderly, despite one in 10 (9%) of those aged 80 and above living with the disease."¹⁰

"When most people think of heart disease, they think of a 'heart attack', but many are unaware of other heart conditions," said Tanya.

"This reinforces the urgent need for increased awareness, better patient education, and a proactive approach to heart health."

Triple cancer survivor, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) advocate, and award-winning international keynote speaker, Justine, 53, Geelong, experienced tiredness, dizziness, and chest flutters – common AF symptoms – in 2012. However, she mistakenly attributed them to her MS diagnosis from 15 months earlier. It wasn't until she was hospitalised with severe headaches, that she learned she was living with AF.

"Living with AF meant I struggled to walk upstairs, or sit up from lying down, and I felt generally unwell most of the time.

"I was unable to stand for long periods of time to paint, which is my passion, and it affected my ability to concentrate as well," Justine said.

“At one point, I lost sensation in my right arm, as well as my hearing.

“However, after trialling various treatments, and undergoing multiple surgeries, I am no longer battling AF,” said Justine.

“Today, I am much more aware of my heart, and no longer take it for granted.”

Justine has a simple message for Australians at risk of developing AF.

“If you are aged 50 or above, have a regular health check-up, and be sure to prioritise your heart health.”

To learn more about the symptoms, management and treatment of AF, visit your doctor, or head to: www.beatafib.com.au.

About Antenna market research

Boston Scientific commissioned Antenna to perform an online, quantitative survey on atrial fibrillation (AF), involving a nationally representative sample of 1,015 Australians aged 50+ years between January 7 to 12, 2025.¹ The data was weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates.

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AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

EXPERTS	
Dr Tomos Walters	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Queensland Cardiovascular Group, BRISBANE
Dr Ben Hunt	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Pindara Private Hospital, GOLD COAST
A/Prof Raymond Sy	Cardiologist; Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Concord Hospital, and Mater Hospital; Director of Arrhythmia Service; and Clinical Associate Professor, University of Sydney, SYDNEY
Dr Ihab El-Sokkari	Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology Services, Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Nepean Public and Private Hospitals and Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney, SYDNEY
Dr Emily Kotschet	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Monash Heart, Holmesglen Private Hospital, Cabrini Hospital, Mulgrave Private Hospital and St John of God Berwick Hospital, MELBOURNE
Dr Christian Verdicchio	CEO, Heart Support Australia, Clinician-researcher & Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney & University of Adelaide, ADELAIDE
Dr Ben King	Specialist Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist; Clinical Lead of the Ventricular Tachycardia Service, Fiona Stanley Hospital; and Senior Lecturer, University of Western Australia, PERTH
PATIENT ADVOCACY GROUP REPRESENTATIVE	
Tanya Hall	Founder and CEO of hearts4heart living well with AF, PERTH
AUSSIES WITH EXPERIENCE OF AF	
Justine, 53	Triple cancer survivor, Multiple Sclerosis advocate, award-winning international keynote speaker, mother and grandmother living with AF, GEELONG
Tom, 78	Former real estate agent, father and grandfather living with AF, MELBOURNE
Gai, 72	Retired pharmacist and business owner, mother and grandmother living with AF, MELBOURNE
Andrew, 59	Business owner, soccer player and stepfather to two whose AF symptoms were triggered by emotional trauma, SYDNEY
Gregory, 59	Water quality technician, father of two, and car enthusiast diagnosed with AF following a workplace accident, BATHURST
Graeme, 55	Father-of-two, government infrastructure executive and avid outdoorsman, alerted to symptoms of AF by his smartwatch, BRISBANE
Elaine, 81	Avid gardener and former seamstress alerted to symptoms of AF via her smartwatch, BRISBANE
Don, 49	Former cosmetic dentist, avid tennis player and father-to-three alerted to symptoms of AF via a smartwatch, GOLD COAST
Kristy, 44	Mother to one, housekeeper and motorbike enthusiast, who first experienced symptoms of AF during labour, GAWLER, SA
Tanya Hall	Developed symptoms of AF in her teens, now living well with AF, PERTH
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