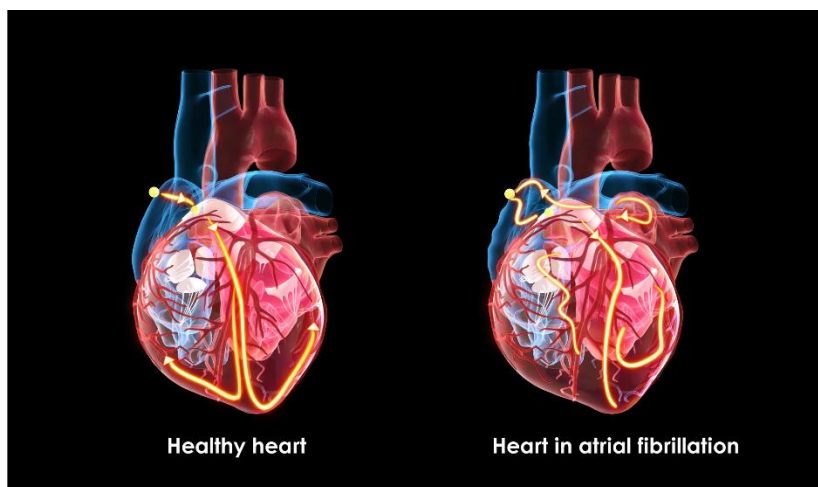


New atrial fibrillation (AF) Australian research findings

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. The major findings included:

Awareness of AF

- While a significant portion of Australians are aware of and understand AF many are not aware and lack understanding.¹
- Two-in-five (41 per cent) Australians aged 50+ years claim to know and understand what AF is, while the concerning majority know little or nothing about the condition.¹
- While 39 per cent of Australians have heard of AF, but do not understand it, a staggering 20 per cent of the population have no knowledge of the heart condition¹ which affects more than half a million Australians.²
- Those aged 65+ years are more likely to understand the disease, compared with those aged 45-54 years (44 per cent compared to 37 per cent, respectively).¹



Prevalence

- AF is a chronic³ and quality of life⁴ compromising condition that affects seven per cent of Australians aged 50+, according to the new survey results. However, given AF is not 'easy to detect', the actual prevalence of AF is thought to be under-estimated.^{1, 5}
- While one-in-five (20 per cent) of the survey respondents have not been formally diagnosed with AF, they have however, experienced symptoms associated with the condition.¹

Impact on quality of life

- Three-quarters (74 per cent) of survey respondents living with the condition claim AF or its symptoms impact their quality of life to some degree. Alarming, 31 per cent of AF patients' lives are either severely (9 per cent) or moderately (22 per cent) affected.¹
- Similarly, more than three-quarters (77 per cent) of Australians living with AF, or its symptoms, feel 'anxious' or 'worried', with 13 per cent reporting 'severe' associations of anxiety or worry due to living with the chronic disease.^{1, 3}
- More than two-in-five (43 per cent) of those living with AF say their ability to socialise is also impacted by AF and its symptoms.¹

- Studies demonstrate AF is associated with a nearly five-times higher likelihood of having a stroke (compared to someone who does not have AF),^{6,7} yet alarming four in five (80 per cent) respondents are completely unaware AF represents **the leading cardiac cause of stroke**.¹
- Those aged between 50-59 years compared with those aged 70+ years are less likely to know of this association (86 per cent vs 71 per cent respectively).¹
- Almost one-in-three (31 per cent) respondents claim to be motivated to take a more proactive approach to their heart health, after learning of the associated risk of stroke, highlighting the need for further community education and awareness of AF.¹



Impact on daily activities for those living with AF

- Nearly two-in-three (65 per cent) report AF or its associated symptoms as affecting their ability to perform daily activities to some extent.¹
 - Almost one in three (31 per cent) claims living with the condition severely or moderately impacts their ability to perform daily activities.¹
- Nearly three in four (72 per cent) say the disease adversely affects their ability to stay active. For 14 per cent of these individuals, their ability to stay active is severely impacted.¹

Recognition of symptoms prior to diagnosis

Among those survey respondents living with AF (n.273):

- Prior to their diagnosis, 64 per cent claim to have recognised palpitations – a rapid, fluttering, or pounding, racing feeling in the chest, as an indicator of AF.¹
 - Gen X survey respondents were more aware of palpitations as an indicator of AF, compared with the Boomers generation (71 per cent compared to 60 per cent, respectively). Similarly, women were significantly more aware palpitations could indicate AF, when compared to their male counterparts, (76 per cent compared to 52 per cent, respectively).¹
- In addition to palpitations, those living with AF identified fatigue (48 per cent), dizziness or light-headedness (43 per cent), shortness of breath (41 per cent), and tightness or discomfort in the chest (31 per cent) as indicators of AF prior to their diagnosis.¹
- Less ‘specific’ symptoms such as ‘fainting’ and ‘exercise intolerance’ were only be recognised by one-in-six (15 per cent), and one-in-four (23 per cent), as a potential indicators of AF in those living with the disease, prior to diagnosis.¹

Causes and risk factors

- The majority of all survey respondents correctly recognise hypertension (72 per cent), heart disease (70 per cent), smoking (68 per cent) and obesity (68 per cent) as risk factors for developing AF.¹
- Fewer survey respondents however, are aware extreme exercise (26 per cent) and hyperthyroidism – when the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone, (25 per cent) are risk factors for developing AF.¹
- The Silent Generation (78+ year olds) is far more aware that heart valve disease (when one or more of the heart valves do not open or close properly)⁸ is a risk factor for developing AF compared with Gen X (77 per cent versus 56 per cent, respectively).¹

Seeking medical advice

- More than a quarter (31 per cent) of Aussies aged 50+ report they could not confidently recognise heart problem-related symptoms and when to seek medical advice.¹
- Half (51 per cent) of the survey respondents say they would seek medical advice after experiencing two or three AF-specific symptoms. For those of the Silent Generation, experiencing two or three AF symptoms is more likely to prompt them to seek medical advice, compared with Gen X (58 per cent versus 49 per cent, respectively).¹
- Concerningly, one-in-three (34 per cent) Australians would only seek medical treatment after experiencing four or more AF symptoms.¹
- The majority of respondents reported the following symptoms would prompt them to seek medical attention – chest tightness (82 per cent), palpitations (77 per cent), fainting (69 per cent) and shortness of breath (67 per cent).¹
- Only a quarter of survey respondents say they would seek medical advice for fatigue or exercise intolerance (29 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).¹

Managing heart health

- Many Australians aged 50+ years monitor their heart health regularly by undergoing:¹
 - Blood pressure checks – (58 per cent)
 - Electrocardiogram tests (ECG) – a test recording electrical activity of the heart)⁹ – (41 per cent)
 - Pulse rate assessments – (37 per cent)
 - Heart auscultation (listening to the sounds of the heart via a stethoscope)¹⁰ – (34 per cent).
- Those aged 70+ years are far more likely to undergo blood pressure checks compared with those aged 50+ years (74 per cent compared to 47 per cent, respectively). Similarly, this older age group is more than twice as likely to receive a heart auscultation (48 per cent versus 23 per cent).¹
- Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of respondent's report taking regular actions to improve their heart health, such as exercising and eating well. However one-in-10 (9 per cent) acknowledge they do not.¹
- One-in-seven (14 per cent) say they are not undergoing checks to monitor their heart health, such as regular blood pressure or cholesterol checks to proactively monitor their heart health.¹
- While majority of respondents (71 per cent) felt they had a decent understanding of the factors affecting their heart health, this survey reveals many wait until they have multiple symptoms before seeking medical care.¹



Treatment

- Of those diagnosed with, or experiencing symptoms of AF, while more than half have been offered advice on lifestyle and behavioural changes (52 per cent), relatively few have been offered more invasive procedures¹ which may indicate a lack of awareness of other treatment options among Australians living with the AF.¹
- Gen X respondents are more likely to have been offered lifestyle and behavioural changes as a management plan for their disease compared with the Silent Generation (59 per cent compared to 30 per cent, respectively).¹

ends#

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