

# **Almost one in four Queenslanders 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**

Almost one in four (24%) Queenslanders aged 50 and above living with the most common, sustained heart rhythm disorder – atrial fibrillation (AF)<sup>1-3</sup> – wait until experiencing four or more symptoms before seeking medical advice, new research reveals.<sup>4</sup>

More than half a million Australians have AF<sup>5</sup> (>102,000 Queenslanders) – a lifelong, progressive disease<sup>6</sup> where faulty electrical signals of the heart cause the top chambers of the heart known as the atria, to beat faster, erratically,<sup>7,8</sup> and out of rhythm with the heart's lower two chambers, the ventricles.<sup>3</sup> Other AF symptoms include chest tightness, fatigue, shortness of breath and dizziness,<sup>6,9</sup> noting 30% to 40% of those affected may show no symptoms at all.<sup>10</sup>

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

"While many Queensland adults claim to understand various factors affecting their heart health,<sup>4</sup> concerningly, the new research reveals 24% wait until experiencing four or more AF symptoms before seeking medical advice.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

"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,"<sup>10,15</sup> Dr Walters said.

"Early diagnosis and intervention is therefore crucial for effective management,<sup>16</sup> and reducing the risk of these potentially life-threatening complications."<sup>10,15</sup>

The new research reveals more than one in three (35%) Queenslanders living with AF report a 'moderate to severe' decline in their quality of life and ability to perform daily activities.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, only 37% of Queenslanders 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.<sup>4</sup>

"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,"<sup>4</sup> said Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist at Pindara Private Hospital, Dr Ben Hunt, Gold Coast.

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

"Mental and emotional stress can affect the heart, with studies suggesting anxiety may trigger heart arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat) like AF.<sup>18</sup> This highlights the need for improved disease awareness and a more proactive approach to detection and diagnosis," Dr Hunt 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,<sup>4</sup> 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,"<sup>19-21</sup> said Dr Hunt.

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

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

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."<sup>10</sup>

"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."

Government infrastructure executive, father-of-two and sportsman, Graeme, 55, Brisbane was alerted to symptoms of AF via his smartwatch in December 2023. He promptly visited an emergency hospital where he was diagnosed with AF.

"Within hours of experiencing symptoms, I was diagnosed and prescribed medication. Within four days, everything had settled down — it was a swift and effective response.

"I was quite alarmed and anxious about the potential implications for my overall health and wellbeing, particularly as this happened on day two of our holiday," Graeme said.

Graeme initially controlled his condition with medication, but over time, it became clear surgery was unavoidable. He experienced some post-surgery complications, but prompt treatment helped him recover.

"In February 2025, I underwent a six-hour open-heart operation to repair and strengthen my mitral valve, close a hole in the wall between my atria, and perform an ablation to treat the AF," said Graeme.

Graeme has some important advice for Australians living with symptoms of AF.

"I've learned the importance of following medical advice and staying disciplined about making healthy choices and lifestyle changes of relevance to my condition.

"If you're experiencing AF symptoms but do not yet have a diagnosis, seek medical advice today," Graeme said.

**To learn more about the symptoms, management and treatment of AF, visit your doctor, or head to: [www.beatafib.com.au](http://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.<sup>1</sup> The data was weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates.

Boston Scientific Pty Ltd, PO Box 332 Botany NSW 1455 Australia. Tel +61 2 8063 8100.

***ends#***

---

## AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

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

<b>DIGITAL MEDIA KIT</b>	<a href="https://afmediakit.com.au">afmediakit.com.au</a>
<b>VIDEO NEWS RELEASE</b>	<a href="https://afmediakit.com.au/vnr">afmediakit.com.au/vnr</a>
<b>RADIO GRABS</b>	<a href="https://afmediakit.com.au/anr">afmediakit.com.au/anr</a>
<b>PIECES TO CAMERA</b>	<a href="https://afmediakit.com.au/ptc">afmediakit.com.au/ptc</a>
<b>MEDIA CONTACTS</b>	<b>Kirsten Bruce &amp; Mel Kheradi, VIVA! Communications</b>  <b>T 02 9968 3741   1604</b> <b>M 0401 717 566   0421 551 257</b> <b>E <a href="mailto:kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au">kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au</a>   <a href="mailto:mel@vivacommunications.com.au">mel@vivacommunications.com.au</a></b>

## References

1. Brieger D, Amerena J, Attia J, Bajorek B, Chan KH, Connell C, et al. National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand: Australian Clinical Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Atrial Fibrillation 2018. *Heart, Lung and Circulation*. 2018;27(10):1209-66.
2. Calkins H, Hindricks G, Cappato R, Kim YH, Saad EB, Aguinaga L, et al. 2017 HRS/EHRA/ECAS/APHS/SOLAECE expert consensus statement on catheter and surgical ablation of atrial fibrillation. *Heart Rhythm*. 2017;14(10):e275-e444.
3. Heart Foundation. What is atrial fibrillation? [Available from: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/atrial-fibrillation>].
4. Understanding AF: Awareness Symptoms and Heart Health Actions. Antenna; 2025.
5. Australian Institute of Health Welfare. Heart, stroke and vascular disease: Australian facts Canberra [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/heart-stroke-vascular-diseases/hsvd-facts/contents/all-heart-stroke-and-vascular-disease/atrial-fibrillation>].
6. Sale A, Yu J. Quality of life instruments in atrial fibrillation: a systematic review of measurement properties. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*. 2022;20(1):143.
7. Nesheiwat Z GA, Jagtap M. Atrial Fibrillation. StatPearls [Internet] Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan. 2023.
8. John Hopkins Medicine. What Is Afib? [Available from: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/atrial-fibrillation>].
9. Freeman JV, Simon DN, Go AS, Spertus J, Fonarow GC, Gersh BJ, et al. Association Between Atrial Fibrillation Symptoms, Quality of Life, and Patient Outcomes. *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*. 2015;8(4):393-402.
10. Kistler PM, Sanders P, Amarena JV, Bain CR, Chia KM, Choo W-K, et al. 2023 Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand Expert Position Statement on Catheter and Surgical Ablation for Atrial Fibrillation. *Heart, Lung and Circulation*. 2024;33(24):828-81, 1443-9506.
11. Randolph TC, Simon DN, Thomas L, Allen LA, Fonarow GC, Gersh BJ, et al. Patient factors associated with quality of life in atrial fibrillation. *Am Heart J*. 2016;182:135-43.
12. Wong CX, Brown A, Tse HF, Albert CM, Kalman JM, Marwick TH, et al. Epidemiology of Atrial Fibrillation: The Australian and Asia-Pacific Perspective. *Heart Lung Circ*. 2017;26(9):870-9.
13. Lippi G, Sanchis-Gomar F, Cervellin G. Global epidemiology of atrial fibrillation: An increasing epidemic and public health challenge. *Int J Stroke*. 2021;16(2):217-21.
14. Ball J, Carrington MJ, McMurray JJ, Stewart S. Atrial fibrillation: profile and burden of an evolving epidemic in the 21st century. *Int J Cardiol*. 2013;167(5):1807-24.
15. American Heart Association. What are the Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation? [Available from: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/atrial-fibrillation/what-are-the-symptoms-of-atrial-fibrillation-afib-or-af>].
16. Schnabel RB, Marinelli EA, Arbelo E, Boriani G, Boveda S, Buckley CM, et al. Early diagnosis and better rhythm management to improve outcomes in patients with atrial fibrillation: the 8th AFNET/EHRA consensus conference. *Europace*. 2023;25(1):6-27.
17. McCabe PJ. Psychological distress in patients diagnosed with atrial fibrillation: the state of the science. *J Cardiovasc Nurs*. 2010;25(1):40-51.
18. Leo DG, Ozdemir H, Lane DA, Lip GYH, Keller SS, Proietti R. At the heart of the matter: how mental stress and negative emotions affect atrial fibrillation. *Front Cardiovasc Med*. 2023;10:1171647.
19. Wang Y, Wang Y, Xu D. Effects of different exercise methods and intensities on the incidence and prognosis of atrial fibrillation. *Trends in Cardiovascular Medicine*. 2024;34(8):510-5.
20. Elliott AD, Verdicchio CV, Mahajan R, Middeldorp ME, Gallagher C, Mishima RS, et al. An Exercise and Physical Activity Program in Patients With Atrial Fibrillation: The ACTIVE-AF Randomized Controlled Trial. *JACC: Clinical Electrophysiology*. 2023;9(4):455-65.

21. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Physical activity [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/physical-activity/physical-activity>].