

Script – Broadcast – Listen to your heart

INTRO

If you've ever felt your heart flip flop, skip a beat or feel like it's banging against your chest wall, it could be signs of atrial fibrillation.

NFL coach Jim Harbaugh knows the feeling all too well. Coaching his San Diego Chargers on October 13, Harbaugh left the sidelines during the first quarter of the Chargers win against the Denver Broncos with arrhythmia, also known as an irregular heartbeat. An arrhythmia is when the heart beats too fast, too slowly, or is out of sync. Symptoms include palpitations, low blood pressure, shortness of breath and fatigue.

Harbaugh has had similar episodes in the past. He's had a cardiac ablation procedure and says he may need another one for his current situation.

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Cardiac ablation is a procedure where thin wires called catheters are threaded into a blood vessel from the groin and guided to the heart. Radiofrequency (heat) or cryotherapy (cold) treatment is used to destroy the cells causing the arrhythmia. Once the abnormal electrical signals are interrupted the normal heart rhythm can take over again.

Dr. Farhad Farokhi is an adult cardiac electrophysiologist with the OSF Cardiovascular Institute, who treats patients with Afib on a daily basis. He says medication can be the first line of defense when it comes to treating Afib, but sometimes medication doesn't work or cardiac ablation may be deemed the most effective method of treatment.

Dr. Farokhi says the procedure has become more common among both men and women, even children who experience Afib. A successful outcome depends on the type of arrhythmia, any abnormality within the heart chamber, the patient's age and other irregularities the patient may have such as congestive heart failure or high blood pressure. Within a few weeks after surgery, the patient should experience significant improvement.

(((SOS)))

Dr. Farhad Farokhi, adult cardiac electrophysiologist with the OSF Cardiovascular Institute

"The patient will feel better, they won't have as many palpitations or fatigue, or shortness of breath. The heart will function more efficiently and in the long term the patient is going to feel better and have less chance of having heart rhythm issues or other heart complications. There is a significant benefit in terms of a patient's ability to exercise, having a better lifestyle and being on fewer medications." (:36)

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According to Dr. Farokhi, advancement in technology has also helped improve the cardiac ablation procedure. Dr. Farokhi adds that if you experience any heart-related symptoms, do not delay and seek help immediately. That's what Harbaugh did. He left the game and was checked out by medical staff before returning to the game. Now, he will wear a heart monitor for the next two weeks.