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A Storm On the Horizon



Anton, atrial fibrillation patient

As a real estate investor with a passion for sailing, Anton needed to be alert, healthy and ready to move whenever the wind changed direction, on the market or on the water. Long solo sailing trips on the open ocean were a regular part of his life, but troubling signs of a heart problem added an unwelcome element of danger in recent years.

After several episodes of an irregular heartbeat, weakness and shortness of breath over a period of half a year, Anton was diagnosed with Paroxysmal Atrial Fibrillation (PAF). Atrial fibrillation (AF or Afib) occurs when the upper chambers of the heart – known as atria – fibrillate. This means that they beat very fast and irregularly and do not pump blood efficiently to the rest of the body. Afib can produce symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, weakness, and an erratic, pounding heartbeat.

As Anton puts it, “So often, I was just exhausted and had to force myself to keep up activities that others take for granted.” With PAF, these episodes can last minutes or even days before the heart resumes its regular rhythm. Equally disconcerting for Anton was the mental effect of these symptoms. “When I had these episodes, whether they lasted for a short 15 minutes or several hours, I would get a feeling of intense dread.”

Exploring options

Anton, at 61 years of age, has always preferred avoiding medications as much as possible and he was not eager to spend the rest of his life taking pills to treat his condition. After some time on the drug therapy route, he began exploring his other options, reaching a real turning point when his doctor told him that if he didn't have surgery to deal with his PAF relatively soon, it might not even be an option for him in his later years.

With that in mind, Anton opted for catheter ablation, a procedure in which energy terminates (ablates) the abnormal electrical pathways in the heart tissue that are causing atrial fibrillation. The energy applied is either heat-based, via radiofrequency (RF) ablation, or cold-based, known as cryoablation.

At the time the only type of catheter ablation possible in the U.S. was the RF procedure, so he underwent the six-hour process. It left Anton feeling, as he puts it, “very rough” and in serious discomfort for several weeks afterwards.

To add to this, his symptoms unfortunately came back a year later, including a particularly serious moment of blacking out during a challenging, overnight sailing trip. This incident convinced him to resolve the issue once and for all. He again began investigating alternatives to solve the problem.

During this investigation period, his doctor recommended the Arctic Front® Cardiac CryoAblation Catheter, a flexible thin tube that is maneuvered through a vessel into the left atrium. Once positioned in the heart, the balloon portion of the catheter is filled with a coolant which applies subzero temperatures to the abnormal pathways and restores normal electrical conduction. Anton underwent surgery a second time, with the hope that cryoablation would provide a more comfortable, effective and long-term solution.

Night and day

His hopes were soon realized. “The difference between the first procedure and the second was night and day,” said Anton. “After the cryoablation I was moving around that same evening,” he said, compared to his experience of weeks of discomfort and fatigue that followed the RF ablation. The cryoablation process also took less than half the time of the RF ablation procedure. Best of all, he has not had any episodes in the three years since the cryoablation procedure, a clear sign of its effectiveness.

Anton was very pleased with the entire cryoablation process, from the information that helped him clearly understand the procedure beforehand to the surgery itself and of course, the results. He joins a growing list of more than 80,000 patients treated with cryoablation in 40 countries worldwide.

“I’m really happy that your company makes what it makes, so that I can feel as good as I do. It changed my life,” Anton said. He has since retired from real estate world but has taken up his passion for the open seas again. And thanks to the cryoablation solution, Anton expects smooth sailing from now on.

This story reflects one person's experience. Not every person will receive the same results. Talk to your doctor about your treatment options.

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