

# Almost half of people with common heart arrhythmia die within ten years of hospitalization, study finds

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## Key Question

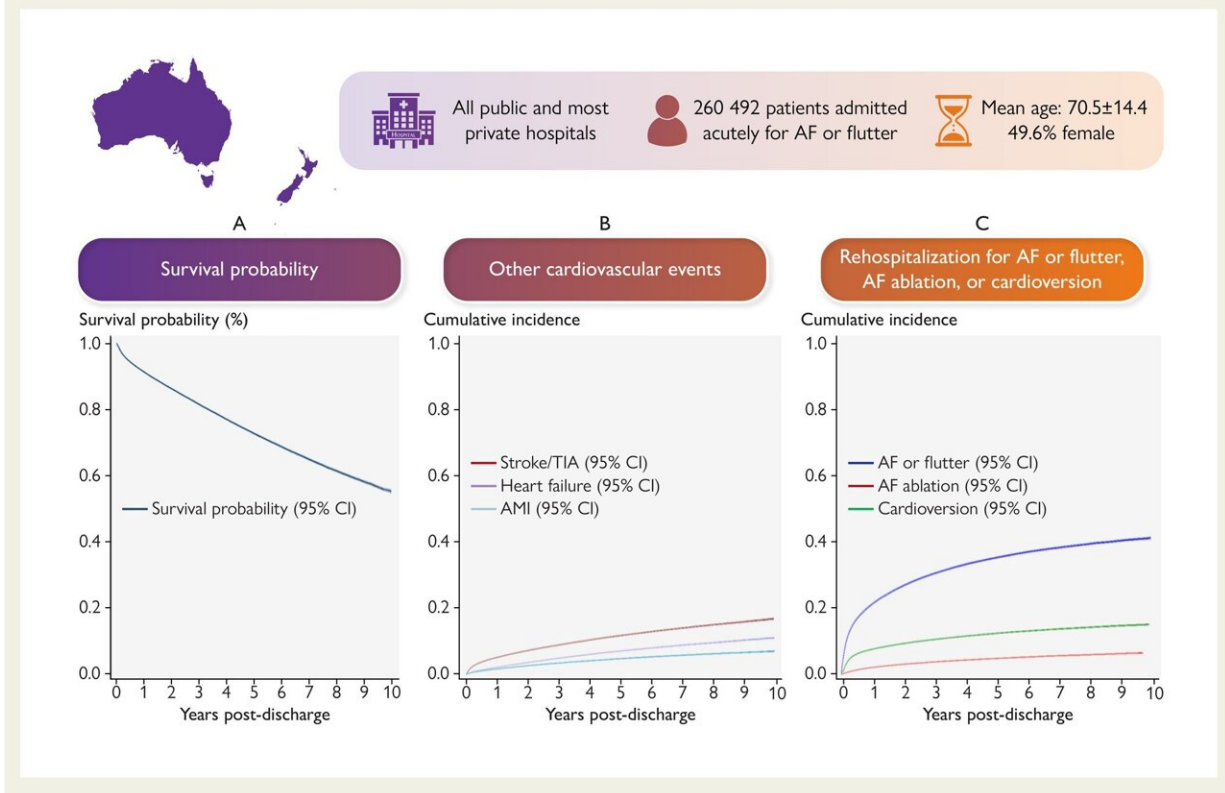
Atrial fibrillation (AF) and flutter are common causes of hospitalizations, but contemporary long-term outcomes of these episodes such as long-term survival, loss of life expectancy, and associated clinical events such as stroke or heart failure are uncertain.

## Key Finding

In this study, 55.2% of 260,492 patients survived at 10 years post-discharge. The estimated loss in life expectancy was 2.6 years. Re-hospitalizations for AF or flutter occurred in 41.2% of patients by 10 years, while the incidence of AF ablation was 6.5%.

## Take Home Message

Patients hospitalized acutely for AF or flutter had high death rates with a moderate loss of life expectancy attributable to AF or flutter. Re-hospitalizations for AF or flutter and associated clinical outcomes were common, while the incidence of AF ablation was low.



Long-term outcomes following a hospitalization for atrial fibrillation or flutter.  
Credit: *European Heart Journal* (2024). DOI: 10.1093/eurheartj/ehae204

Of patients admitted to hospital for atrial fibrillation (AF) in Australia and New Zealand, 45% die within a decade, according to University of Queensland research.

A team led by Dr. Linh Ngo from UQ's Faculty of Medicine analyzed data from more than 250,000 patients admitted for AF and [atrial flutter](#)—a closely related condition—to all public and most [private hospitals](#) in Australia and New Zealand between 2008 and 2017.

The [results](#) are published in *European Heart Journal*.

"AF is the most common heart rhythm disorder and the leading cause of heart-related hospitalizations globally, causing symptoms like palpitations, dizziness, and [chest pain](#)," Dr. Ngo said.

"The disorder is closely associated with stroke, but we know much less about the risk of recurrent hospitalizations and other consequences such as [heart failure](#) or death.

"Unfortunately, we found only 55.2% of patients hospitalized with atrial fibrillation survived beyond a decade."

Dr. Ngo said while some of those deaths were attributable to co-existing conditions, the research showed AF reduced a patient's life expectancy on average by 2.6 years.

"At 10 years, 1 in 10 patients had suffered a stroke, 1 in 6 were hospitalized for heart failure, and 41.2% had been readmitted due to

recurrent atrial fibrillation or flutter," she said.

Co-author and cardiologist Associate Professor Isuru Ranasinghe from the Prince Charles Hospital said the research revealed at 10 years, less than 7% of patients had catheter ablation procedure, one of the most effective treatments for patients with symptomatic atrial fibrillation.

"It may mean this procedure was underused in Australian and New Zealand hospitals," Dr. Ranasinghe said.

"Clinicians currently primarily focus on preventing the risk of stroke, but these findings emphasize the need to consider [atrial fibrillation](#) as a chronic disease with multiple serious downstream consequences.

"There needs to be a greater focus on preventing recurrent hospitalizations and heart failure.

"The literature also suggests many patients at high risk of a stroke fail to receive blood thinning medications, so current preventative efforts are far from ideal.

"Better patient education in areas such as blood pressure control and [weight loss](#), as well as appropriate preventative therapy in hospital and [primary care](#) could improve the outcomes for people with AF."

**More information:** Linh Thi Hai Ngo et al, Long-term outcomes after hospitalization for atrial fibrillation or flutter, *European Heart Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/eurheartj/ehae204](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehae204)

Provided by University of Queensland

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