

## Generations

# A heart-to-heart chat entering 2019

**A** couple of weeks ago, it was time to get weighed in as part of my quest to slim down under the direction of my fabulous, totally understanding personal physician.

He only asked for 3 pounds in three months, and that didn't seem difficult, but at 70-plus years, and knowing the only true exercise this gal gets is walking down to the mailbox and back, I realized it wasn't going to be a piece of cake (no pun intended).

The Mediterranean Diet seemed to be working for me because it gave me stuff that other diets didn't, such as red fruits and my absolute favorite filler, sweet potatoes.

Put a little bacon bits and a teaspoon of olive oil on that potato and, to me, my craving was pretty well satisfied. Yogurt with chopped walnuts helped the nighttime urges when every other commercial on TV was some sort of fast-food combo.

Substitutions quell the sudden desires but, of course, I miss bread, pasta, pizza, chocolate, ice cream, and all the other goodies that tempt one's fancy. It was those 3 little pounds that I thought about every time I yearned to cheat a little.

So, my big day came, and I was elated to learn that I had doubled



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the goal and lost a total of 6 pounds. I admit that I have to give some credit to the miserable cold that I had two weeks before, when everything was tasteless, and going to bed extra early helped the diet

cause and cured the cold. My savior physician, always patient, always caring about the whole self, decided to listen to my old ticker just to be sure the cold bug wasn't lingering in the lungs. It wasn't a quick listen like usual, and that's when I first heard the word "AFib," which is short for atrial fibrillation. And after some tests, he delivered the news that I had it.

"AFib," according to a little book given to me chock-ful of information, is the most common type of arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythm), and in the US alone, about 6 million people have it (make that 6 million and 1).

A heart beats 60 to 80 times a minute at rest, but with AFib, your electrical signals become

irregular, which makes it work even harder, and the heart may at times beat 100 to 175 times per minute.

This, in turn, could lead to serious complications, including increased risk of stroke, which is what my mother suffered from and eventually passed away from many years ago.

My next visit was to the Sanger Heart and Vascular Institute here in Morganton, where I met my new, amazing cardiologist, who took the time to explain everything to me in words I can understand.

With AFib, the upper two chambers, called the atria, do not contract properly to push the blood into the lower chambers, called ventricles. Instead, the atria flutter, or fibrillate. As a result, some blood remains in the atria, which can pool, and a clot may form. These clots can do damage because they can travel to the brain and result in a stroke.

Today, thank goodness, doctors have options that can help reduce the risk of stroke associated with AFib, and these options include medicines like blood thinners as well as others to control heart rate and rhythm, which

have become my best friends.

These medicines don't treat AFib, but they do help reduce the formation of blood clots. Since blood clots are a major cause of strokes, preventing clots from forming sounds like a very good plan to lowering the risk of stroke.

AFib took me by surprise because I didn't have any of the signs. I had no heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, chest pain or fatigue. And if I missed it, I was worried that some of you reading this column might be missing the signs, too.

So, this is a heart-to-heart from me to all of you with a request that you take care of yourself and not put off a doctor's appointment, especially a physical, because you don't have the time, don't have the symptoms or don't want to know.

As we say goodbye to 2018 and welcome 2019, please make time for you, your heart and the rest of you. It's not only a resolution that you can easily keep, but it's one that may just save your life.

Happy New Year.

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