



## **Calming My Heart**

**By Jackie Burgess, RDH**

This is my story.... How I calmed my heart prior to ablation...and after. Three distinct components blended into one harmonious remedy worked for me... Mind, Body and Spirit.

I was already tuned into holistic healing from research on my other conditions, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, candidiasis, hypoadrenalism and hypothyroidism, so I just added atrial fibrillation to my list of search topics and added more targeted nutrients directed by my doctor, but other healing modalities are also involved.

To summarize in a few words what I think helped me the most, I'd say magnesium, taurine, potassium, energy work and acceptance of a higher power and my own spirituality. Almost a year after I began this calming quest, I know I am not the same person who set out on the journey.

### **Background**

My first afib event occurred at age 59 and lasted for about an hour and a half. Over the next eight years, the events increased in frequency until January 2003 when I began experiencing daily or every other day events that were lasting over 20 hours.

At that time and after two trips to the ER, six weeks apart with 3 and 4-day stays in the hospital for breakthrough arrhythmia while on flecainide, and involving a TEE (trans esophageal echocardiography) and cardioversion at one visit, it was suggested that I give serious thought to ablation. I refused the attempt to reintroduce a beta-blocker since I had taken myself off Toprol XL six months prior and felt much better without it although the event frequency remained the same. Clearly, drugs were not the answer for me in controlling afib.

"Ablation"! What I had never, ever wanted to do and wouldn't even consider previously. Yet, I knew I couldn't go on with this pattern every six weeks. I was on 200 mg a day of flecainide and was feeling the effects of the double dose - fatigue and lethargy. I had instructions to take an additional 100 mg every time afib began...so I was taking the extra dose every day or every other day. I was very nervous about the high dosage.

During my consultation appointment at the Cleveland Clinic with EP, Andrea Natale, MD, the EP nurse told me that the more calm my heart at the time of ablation, the better my chances would be for a successful and calm heart after the ablation. I thought at the time, "Well, good luck. If I could keep my heart calm, I wouldn't have just had two 3-day sessions in the ER with runaway afib."

Nevertheless, I took the comment "to heart" and collaborated with my functional medicine MD (Dr. Sprecher) about the best approach to do just that...calm my heart and hopefully cure this condition so an ablation wouldn't be necessary. That was my ultimate goal. This was in early April 2003. I was assigned an ablation date of November 12. Six months of waiting and six months to affect a "cure."

### The Calming Plan

Dr. Sprecher suggested I work on each facet of healing mind, body and spirit. I pulled out all the stops.

In addition to the already lengthy list of targeted nutrients she directed, I consulted with a homeopath, a psychologist who does mind, body, spirit work, an MD who does acupuncture and has a Doctor of Chinese Medicine degree, several massage therapists, and a chiropractic physician who does energy work based on Applied Kinesiology (AK). And, I had the support of fellow afibbers on the forum offering suggestions and current ablation research. Erling Waller, Jim W., Stan B., Lorraine, Hans...everyone helped me sort out ablation facts. This was invaluable support.

The homeopathic approach was a bust. I quickly fired him. The psychologist was viewing me as long-term income; my gut instinct rejected this approach; I fired him. I had about 20 acupuncture treatments that were calming, but didn't seem to help, although I learned a lot about Chinese Medicine and energy between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. I can't say it didn't help, but it didn't stop the breakthrough arrhythmia.

It was kismet that I found the chiropractor who does energy work. A friend was seeing him for neck pain which he traced to blocked emotions and negative energy. The bells went off and I made an appointment. I knew I had a lot of stuffed emotions and stress and knew instinctively that issue was part of my problem. I was drawn to that connection the minute she started describing his work.

I began NET treatments (Neuro Emotional Technique) which includes Applied Kinesiology, with Dr. Jordan the first of July (having wasted far too much valuable time with the other approaches) and saw him twice a week for about six weeks.

Various conditions were discovered and addressed through NET wherein locked emotional responses called Neuro Emotional Complexes (emotional reality) are detected with reflex responses or patterns...much like the Pavlov-dog response. Negative emotional responses (either conscious or unconscious) can manifest as symptoms and the result is ill health and imbalance. Neuropeptides carry emotions throughout the body. NET seeks to normalize neurological imbalances using physical corrections and removes the blockages to the body's natural healing process.

One very significant finding was a displaced diaphragm that was causing hiccoughs that set off afib immediately. Once the diaphragm was repositioned and it held in that position (about five treatments), I no longer triggered afib in that manner. Hiccoughs are a spasm of the diaphragm and attributed to magnesium deficiency.

Concomitant with that, Erling Waller, who had previously attempted to get me to understand the importance of magnesium deficiency by sending me very convincing evidence on the subject, began again to hammer away at intractable magnesium deficiency. All the while I thought I was taking enough magnesium...400 mg a day plus that from my food. I continued to read the data.

Finally, I had a revelation based on a posting from Carol on the BB saying she increased her magnesium up to 800 or 1,000 mg daily and had stopped her afib. I tried increasing gradually while I was getting the emotional energy work from Dr. Jordan. After the first session, I went 5 days without an event. This was a record. Then I went a week, then 13 days and by the end of August...breakthrough arrhythmia was not a common occurrence. If it happened, it was short...sometimes 2 hours or less. Previously, I was always afibbing for around or over 20 hours. The record was 39 hours before converting on my own.

In my case, Erling was right about magnesium deficiency. My magnesium glycinate dosage was at 800 mg daily. I also made a conscious effort to use only unsoftened water for drinking and cooking. While I have a well with hard water and a separate spigot in another area for unsoftened water, I admit to frequently being lazy and just using what was handy. After reading that water softened with sodium (either well water or municipal water) removes magnesium and calcium, I resolved not to use the water produced from our in-house softening system and to take 100% advantage of our naturally occurring spring water.

Additionally, Dr. Jordan found my thyroid was low by AK testing, even though my labs indicated normal, and added an additional support supplement for thyroid along with homeopathics for heart and emotions.... anger, repression, fear, fear of abandonment, disappointment, sadness - all of these blocked emotions he uncovered and released while doing the energy work. This was the mind/body part of the triad. It served to force me to acknowledge emotional stresses I had been suppressing for years and to deal with the reality of eliminating the causes of the stress. This is an ongoing project.

Negative energy is very damaging. One can't attain or maintain health in its presence. I began to play constantly audio tapes given to me by friends who knew of my journey. They were the smart ones who understood better than I about the mind/body/spirit connection. The tapes by Carolyn Myss - "Why People Don't Heal and How they Can" along with Wayne Dyer's "A Spiritual Solution for Every Problem," became my favorites because they spoke to me the most in terms of what I needed to address. Books that helped shape my thoughts were, The Art of Effortless Living, Full Catastrophe Living, and Power versus Force.

I had always stayed away from the spiritual aspect because I lumped spiritualism and religion together. Having had a very traumatic experience with religion early on in my life, I shied away from anything religious, but suddenly these tapes (and again, Erling- my mentor) opened my mind to spiritual healing and awareness. I got comfortable with the thought that I was a spiritual being and recognized that I had denied myself this privilege most all of my adult life. This was quite a revelation because I had always prided myself in being open minded; yet I was totally closed to spirituality. But once I let the thought develop and I became comfortable, my life and condition began to change and all for the better.

By mid-September, the "new me" was afib free, but still on flecainide and I decided to wean off. Time was running out... I hoped to cancel the ablation, but in less than a week, I went into a nasty afib event. I chickened out. Went back on the flecainide and focused on getting a calm heart (again) by the time of ablation.

Both Dr. Sprecher and Dr. Jordan worked to honor my ablation commitment and to help me become comfortable with it. They both insisted that if I had doubts or fears that ablation wouldn't work or the outcome wouldn't be good...it wouldn't be. (You are what you think.) We worked very hard on my mindset.

By the ablation date, I had been afib-free for two months (but still on the drug). I faced all my concerns about the ablation and concentrated on thinking nothing but positive thoughts about the outcome. With the help of the energy work, I became comfortable and at peace with having the procedure I never wanted. I even accepted the Coumadin issue.

All thoughts were about the positive outcome and I developed a mantra which I said anytime my mind began to waver or I had negative thoughts: "Manifest Peace in My Heart"..... either out loud if I were alone, or to myself, otherwise. I did this while placing one hand on my solar plexus. Sometimes I positioned my hands differently or if I were driving, I just held on to the steering wheel and focused on breathing through my heart with positive energy and positive thoughts. I developed a whole script of "manifests" that I said then and continue to say now. I connect with my spiritual being many times a day. Any time I feel my thoughts drifting into negative territory or I feel stressed, I become centered again with my focus or grounded by my mantras.

Coupled with this mantra ritual, I incorporated my use of therapeutic essential oils from plants known to create cellular energy and to possess strong antioxidant properties. This was just a natural complement.

I had an energy session with Dr. Jordan about 4 days prior to the ablation to eliminate any negative energy or fears and to create only positive energy and acceptance. He pronounced that I tested very strong and was ready for the procedure. I repeated the sequence, visiting him again 4 days after ablation for more clearing.

The night before the ablation, I was calm and peaceful. I went to bed with my "manifests" in place and slept well until early morning. Normally, the hour's drive to the hospital would have been an anxious one.... I was very calm and I said my mantra constantly. I had absolutely no fear or anxiety at any time before, during or after the procedure.

On a physical level, in mid-September, I began working out more days and more intensely. This was difficult with the burden of the extra flecainide but I kept pushing. By the time of ablation, I was doing well; my stamina had increased and I felt stronger, overall. I hated to think I would have to lay off during the recovery period.

Additionally during this time of no afib but still on flecainide, I was able to do some things that had previously triggered afib.... bending over from the waist for an extended period of time; lie or sleep on my left side; lie down flat in bed; and even some of the former triggers such as dessert or cheese did not bring on afib.

About three weeks prior to ablation, I took increased doses of vitamin C (2 grams daily) with bioflavonoids to reduce trauma effects and inflammation. I was given that instruction with another surgery. Thought it couldn't hurt with this procedure. And I stopped the use of ginkgo, vitamin E and the occasional aspirin, since I was going to be on Coumadin two weeks before ablation and at least 6 weeks after.

By the date of ablation, I was comfortable with taking 800 mg of magnesium glycinate a day. The brand I chose was Metagenics. I took it to the hospital with me and planned to take it at my first opportunity after I was free to move around. My reasoning was that stress depletes magnesium and I had no reason to think that my body would not consider ablation a huge stressor.

I took 200 mg of the MgG every couple of hours until it was time for discharge. I also took regular doses of vitamin C with bioflavonoids (500 mg) to reduce inflammation and a natural, plant-based product called Phytoprofen. The reasoning was to control as much inflammation as possible.

Of course, I did not share any of this with the hospital staff. However, they knew I was using the therapeutic essential oils of plants because of the lovely, calming fragrance and effect of Lavender oil...just entering my room made the staff wonder what the wonderful "smell" was. Some came in to get a "fix" and left. It was fun. My room mate who had terminal liver failure found it especially comforting.

Once home, I continued my daily supplement routine but added increased amounts of natural anti-inflammatory plant-based products....like quercetin, bromelain and turmeric. And I maintained the higher C dose for six weeks.

Additionally, I continued with all the good blood thinning support like Omega 3 oils even though I was on Coumadin. I was only taking CoQ10 at 100 mg when I came home, but soon realized with the problems created by Lipitor, I needed much more so I increased it to 500 a day.

## The Results

From the time of the ablation to present, I have been afib-free.

- 2 months before ablation on flecainide - no breakthrough afib

- 2 months after ablation on flecainide & Coumadin - no afib
- 1 month off both drugs - no afib - added nattokinase for anticlotting
- 3 months post ablation - calm heart - no drugs - no afib
- I have no residual symptoms of afib or the ablation.

In the first two months post ablation, I had 9 PACs and six of those beats were a pattern that felt as if it would progress to afib. It did not. While off all drugs, I get an occasional single missed beat or a thud. Nothing else.

When I work out, my elevated heart rate returns quickly to normal. Occasionally when I lie down for the night, I feel a jittery feeling in my chest, but my heart beat is normal. I just do my mantras and fall asleep. My sleep is deep and uninterrupted.

I take no prescription drugs except my natural hormone patch and cream. My last official blood pressure reading was 114/68 - pulse 76. At rest, my pulse is around 65.

My heart is peaceful. I'm grateful. I thank God, Dr. Natale and all the wonderful people on this Bulletin Board for helping me reach this goal. Your support is invaluable and very much appreciated.

Thank you with all my heart! (and soul)

#### Abbreviated list of my nutritional supplements

My diet is modified Paleo type with whole foods, organic when available, cooked from scratch, no bad fats. Moderate portions. No sugar, no caffeine, no alcohol. 3 meals a day and 2 snacks. Hydrate with unsoftened water...in abundance and at least 16 oz a day of the Waller Water.

In addition to my Core Supplements program, here's what I took to calm my heart.

- 800 mg magnesium glycinate - reduced to 600 mg. one month post-ablation
- 1 teaspoon, bulk taurine - reduced to ½ teaspoon one month post-ablation
- 300 mg herbal potassium
- 100 mg CoQ10 - 500 mg after ablation
- Mitochondrial Resuscitate (Metagenics product)
- Omega 3 essential fatty acids fish oil, 6 grams
- 2 grams vitamin C with bioflavonoids
- 100 mcg selenium
- 400 IU vitamin E in the tocotrienol form - stopping prior to ablation
- 120 mg Ginkgo biloba - again stopping 3 weeks prior to ablation
- Phytoprofen - plant based anti-inflammatory product
- Cholarest - plant based lipid lowering product
- Min Tran Food-based minerals for heart support.

Many other daily nutrients are supplied in a combination form in preparations targeting specific systems.... and for conserving space, I've only listed the systems addressed by supplementation. (You don't want to see the list!)

- Anti-inflammatory
- Antioxidant
- Lipid lowering
- Methylation
- Glucose handling
- Probiotics
- Digestive enzymes

- Proteolytic enzymes
- Thyroid support.

By early April 04, the results of my post ablation labs will be evaluated and we will be making adjustments in supplement protocol so I can cut down or eliminate where cellular testing indicates I've reached proper levels.

### Post Script

One wise poster on the BB once cautioned, "never get cocky." I didn't think that my Calming the Heart post was bragging or cocky. I just wanted to share the joy of having a calm heart with fellow afibbers.

Not long after that post and after 103 days post ablation, breakthrough arrhythmia began on 2/24/04, lasting 39 hours, terminated by cardioversion; placed on flecainide for one week; then off again; then 9 days later, I had another brief run of AF for 20 minutes.

Now what to think?

At my check back on 3/3/04 with Dr. Natale at the CCF he said if this pattern continues, I'd be a candidate for a touch up but to wait for a couple of months to see what develops.

Initially, when the 2/24 AF occurred, I blamed a high stress level; I was dealing with the failing health of my beloved cat who is about 16 and is most likely on the last of his nine lives. Now, I'm inclined to also attribute a low-functioning thyroid to a large portion of the problem. But, that brings up the question....if the ablation was successful, how could hypothyroid conditions trigger an event? I do not have an answer.

There is good news, however. Recent blood tests indicated my C-reactive protein level had dropped from 1.08 to .439. This marker for inflammation had been rising continually as AF was worsening and on-going. The closer to zero, the better for this number. So my concerted effort using natural anti-inflammatories was successful, that and not having the heart in constant afib.

Additionally, Fibrinogen, was within range – 444 in a range of 170-460 – and had been 656 and 556. More work needs to be done here but at least it is coming down.

Homocysteine came down from 9.1 to 7.1 ...5 or lower is considered excellent.

Hemoglobin A1C - indicator for diabetes - 5.5 (<6.5 = non-diabetic)

Candida Immune Complexes - .10 in a range of .10 - .90

### Thyroid Imbalance

The thyroid profile survey results indicate an imbalance. All the numbers are in range, except Reverse T3 which is elevated. This is called Euthyroid Sick Syndrome (ESS).. meaning the thyroid numbers are normal but hypothyroidism exists nevertheless.

In ESS, when the body is under stress, instead of converting T4 into T3 (the active form of thyroid hormone that works at the cellular level) – the body makes what is known as Reverse T3 (RT3) as an inactive form of the T3 hormone, to conserve energy. ....thus the hypothyroid symptoms such as fatigue, which I have been experiencing since December but what I had chalked up to the aftermath of the PVI. In fact because I had the adverse Lipitor side effects, I thought it triggered fibromyalgia again. My major symptoms: muscle and joint aches and pains, internal chilliness, cold in a normal room temperature, cold skin, basal temperature reading around 97.2 and oral temp at any time during the day ranging 97.4 – 97.7, outer third of eyebrows now missing (again), thinning hair, brittle fingernails, and absolutely no energy...go to bed tired, wake up tired. ...all classic symptoms of hypothyroidism.

ESS is frequently exacerbated by extreme stress, such as surgical trauma or critical illness. My doctor zeroed in right away when she saw the RT3 number and said...it was undoubtedly the stress of the PVI procedure. Some diagnostic descriptions of ESS indicate a stage of subclinical exhaustion imposed by pre-existing, undue stress...either emotional or physical.

In addition to the stress factor, ionizing radiation can have an adverse impact on the thyroid gland. The PVI does provide exposure from the fluoroscopy but I doubt there is a way to shield the thyroid because of the carotid artery catheter insertion.

Also, when evaluating thyroid function, we have to consider age as a factor. Aging generally decreases thyroid function. I also had a dye contrast spiral CAT scan to rule out post ablation stenosis.... but this was after the thyroid panel. Still, the iodine-based dye is damaging to the thyroid. I won't be submitting to another CAT scan any time soon.

My doctor is reluctant to begin a course of the natural hormone, Armour Thyroid, because of the risk of initiating an afib event and has placed me on a course of neonatal glandular support formulated to improve the communication between the pituitary, hypothalamus and thyroid which is apparently where the problem with ESS lies.

However, it is also well known that too low thyroid hormone levels can also initiate an afib event. In fact, I am convinced that my unusual breakthroughs were the result of a low-functioning thyroid since I had previously gone so long without arrhythmia. But, there is still the question about how this could occur if the ablation is successful.

Within a week of taking this supplement, I have actually begun to feel human once again. The first thing to diminish - the muscle and joint aches. Welcome relief. I had stopped exercising for over two weeks due to the intense discomfort and fatigue. I am now feeling much less fatigued, but my body temperature is still low, and I know I have a long way to go to regain the lost ground.

This experience with diminished thyroid function (identified as subclinical hypothyroidism - SCHT) and my recent recurrence of afib compels me to remind everyone to pay attention to your thyroid numbers; but also, to be ware that the single-most important diagnostic tool is how you feel. If you have hypothyroid symptoms, yet you are told your numbers fall into the normal range, do the research on why hypothyroidism is called "the unsuspected illness." It is estimated that over 27 million people are thought to be subclinically hypothyroid and under-diagnosed. This estimate would make thyroid disease more common in North America than diabetes. Be sure you aren't a statistic.

Hypothyroidism is a definite, contributing factor to atrial fibrillation. There are many symptoms of SCHT often mistaken for and treated as other conditions. Internal (basal) body temperature is a key diagnostic tool.

I've initiated this topic for examination in the Conference Room. Be sure you go here to note, at the very least, the many and often subtle symptoms. Everyone should be aware of SCHT and the potential for what it can mean in terms of your general health in addition to the impact this deficiency can have on atrial fibrillation. I invite you to become informed and aware.

Meanwhile, I'm still calm and still smiling!

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