Thoracoscopic Maze for Atrial Fibrillation

This is a minimally invasive surgery for treating atrial fibrillation, also called a-fib or AF. The doctor works with special tools and a camera through very small openings in the chest. It has been very successful and patients often have a fast recovery with little pain. Nearly all patients are able to stop taking medicines that have helped to thin their blood and correct their heart rhythm after this is done.

How the surgery is done

Three or 4 small cuts or openings are made on each side of the chest. Each cut is about ½ inch long. The doctor places surgical tools and a fiberoptic camera through these small openings. These tools are controlled by the doctor, who uses the camera to see the heart. With this type of heart surgery, there is not a large chest incision, no heart pump is needed, and the heart does not need to be stopped. Also, no blood thinners are needed, and no radiation is used.
The doctor isolates, or blocks, the areas that cause a-fib. The doctor uses instruments on the outside of the heart to block permanently the irregular electrical signals that cause a-fib. The appendage of the left atrium, where blood clots can form, is also removed to reduce the risk of stroke. The effect is to cure the a-fib, while maintaining normal atrial pumping.

It takes about 4 hours for surgery. Most patients are sent home after 3 nights.

This can also be done during other heart surgery such as bypass surgery or heart valve surgery. The surgical tools would be put through the open chest.

**After Surgery**

- You may be on medicine to thin your blood for about 3 months after surgery.

- Most patients stay in a normal heart rhythm after surgery. If there is still a-fib after the surgery, it is often because of the irritation to the heart tissue from the surgery. The irritation will go away about 4 weeks after surgery as the heart heals. If this happens, your doctor will keep you on heart rhythm medicine until the heart heals.

- You will need to wear a heart rhythm monitor for 2 weeks at 3, 6 and 13 and 24 months after your surgery. The monitor lets your doctor check for any periods of a-fib. The doctor will use the results to know when it is safe to stop your heart rhythm or blood thinning medicines.

- There are no activity limits after surgery.

- There are no sternal precautions after surgery.

- When it is time to go home, you will be told more about your care.

- You may also want to refer to [www.ohioafib.com](http://www.ohioafib.com) for more information.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).