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Watchman Alternatives

Other ways to seal off the pouch where most AFib clots form, so you can often stop long-term blood thinners.

About 90%
of the clots in non-valve AFib form in the appendage

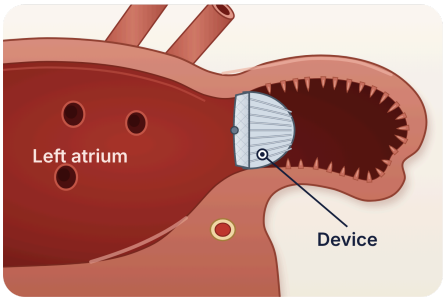
45 days
of blood thinner usually follow a Watchman FLX. Amulet often skips it.

33%
fewer strokes or clots to the body when closed during heart surgery

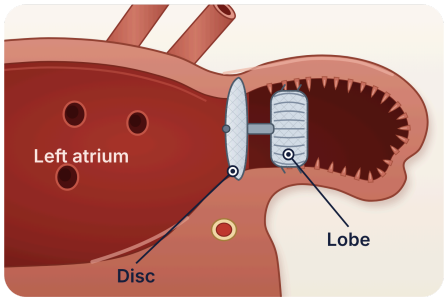
THE OPTIONS IN THE US

Three ways to close the appendage

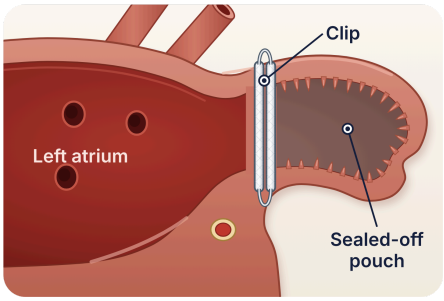
1 Watchman FLX



2 Amplatzer Amulet



3 AtriClip



The left atrial appendage is a small, finger-shaped pouch on the side of the left atrium, the heart's upper-left chamber. In AFib, blood slows in the pouch, and a clot can form there and travel to the brain. The Watchman FLX and the Amulet go in by catheter through a vein in the groin. The AtriClip is a clip a surgeon places from outside the heart, most often during other heart surgery, or on its own through small chest incisions when the appendage is too small or oddly shaped for a catheter device.

WHO IT'S FOR

AFib, a high stroke risk and a problem with blood thinners

Stroke risk is high enough
AFib not caused by a valve problem, with a CHA2DS2-VASc stroke-risk score of 2 or higher in men or 3 or higher in women.

Blood thinners aren't safe
A prior brain bleed, repeated stomach or bowel bleeds, severe falls with injury, or work or hobbies with a high risk of injury.

Blood thinners have failed
A stroke despite a blood thinner, or a major bleed that forced you to stop it.

AFib from rheumatic mitral stenosis or a mechanical heart valve usually needs a blood thinner for the valve itself, so closure doesn't fit. A clot already in the heart has to be resolved first.

Ask about the operator

Experience counts. Ask how many LAA closures the operator has done, whether the center routinely offers both Watchman FLX and Amulet, and what its complication rate is.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

Your medicines, the risks and when to get help

MEDICINES AFTER EACH DEVICE

Watchman FLX	Typically 45 days of a blood thinner (warfarin or a DOAC, one of the newer blood thinners), then aspirin plus clopidogrel for the rest of the first 6 months, then aspirin alone indefinitely.
Amplatzer Amulet	Many people go straight to aspirin plus clopidogrel after the procedure, with no blood thinner. That typically continues for 1 to 6 months, then aspirin alone.
AtriClip	The clip closes the appendage from outside the heart and leaves nothing inside the atrium, so there is no device for a clot to form on. The tradeoff is a more invasive operation with a longer recovery.
Follow-up ultrasound	A TEE (an ultrasound taken from inside the esophagus) at about 45 days (for the Watchman FLX, and for the Amulet in its main trial), and again at 6 months to confirm the seal and check for clot on the device.

SERIOUS PROBLEMS ARE UNCOMMON

1 to 4%
Clot on the device
Over time, usually found on a routine TEE

About 1%
Hole in the heart wall
The team is set up to treat it right away

0.5 to 1%
Stroke during the procedure
A TEE first rules out a visible clot

Under 1%
Device comes loose
Usually retrieved by catheter or surgery

Bruising at the groin is normal, and a palm-sized bruise is common and fades over 2 to 3 weeks. A sore throat from the TEE probe usually clears in a day or two. A clot on the device is usually treated with a brief return to a blood thinner. Device infection is very rare, under 0.1%.

CALL 911

Signs of stroke	Sudden weakness, slurred speech, vision loss or a severe headache, at any time after the procedure. The ambulance can take you straight to a stroke center.
Heart and breathing	Sudden severe shortness of breath, chest pain with sweating or nausea, or fainting or near-fainting.
Bleeding or deep pain	Severe bleeding at the groin that doesn't stop with pressure, or sudden severe belly or back pain.

CALL THE OFFICE WITHIN HOURS

Groin and fever	New or growing groin swelling, bleeding through the dressing, severe groin pain, or a fever above 101 Fahrenheit.
New symptoms	New chest pain that doesn't go away, marked shortness of breath, or new palpitations that feel different from your usual.

CAN I TAKE A BLOOD THINNER LATER?

Yes, if you need one for something else, such as a clot in a leg or lung. Closure doesn't rule out blood thinners. It makes them unnecessary for AFib stroke prevention in most cases.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

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watchman-alternatives

For education only, and not a substitute for advice from your own physician. Sources include the PREVAIL, PROTECT AF, PINNACLE FLX, AMULET IDE, LAAOS III and EWOLUTION trials, the 2019 AHA/ACC/HRS atrial fibrillation focused update and the 2020 ESC atrial fibrillation guidelines.

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