

VATS AtriClip: Left Atrial Appendage Closure

Video-Assisted Thoracoscopic (VATS) Left Atrial Appendage Closure using the AtriClip device is a new state-of-the-art procedure, designed to help patients with atrial fibrillation reduce their risk of stroke. This minimally-invasive procedure is now available on the Gold Coast and is performed by Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Dr Cheng He. In this guide, we will explain how the procedure works, why it is done, and what to expect before, during, and after the procedure.

What is atrial fibrillation (AFib)?

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a heart condition in which the heart beats irregularly, potentially leading to the formation of blood clots in the left atrial appendage (LAA). Blood clots can travel to the brain and cause a stroke. The LAA is a small sac-like structure attached to the left atrium of the heart. 95% of AFib-related strokes occur due to blood clots from the LAA. Therefore, appropriate management of the left atrial appendage in AFib patients can significantly reduce the risk of long-term stroke.

How is the procedure performed?

Thoracoscopic left atrial appendage closure with AtriClip is a minimally invasive surgical procedure that is used to close off the left atrial appendage. The procedure is performed under general anaesthesia and typically takes 15-30 minutes. The procedure involves the use of a small camera called a thoracoscope and special instruments that are inserted through three small incisions. The AtriClip device is then applied to the base of the left atrial appendage, sealing it off to prevent blood clots from forming within it.

What to expect after the procedure

After the VATS AtriClip procedure is complete, you may need to be in hospital for 2 to 3 days. Pain medications will be prescribed to manage any discomfort, and you will receive instructions on how to care for yourself at home. You should avoid heavy lifting and strenuous activities for 2 weeks after the procedure. You will need to follow-up with Dr He, who will monitor your recovery.

Benefits of VATS AtriClip

- Reduces the risk of stroke in individuals with atrial fibrillation who cannot take blood thinners (anticoagulation medications) or have had bleeding complications on blood thinners
- Minimally-invasive technique resulting in shorter hospital stay and faster recovery
- Safe and effective

What are the risks of the procedure?

As with any surgery, there are potential risks and complications associated with the procedure. These risks include bleeding, infection, damage to surrounding structures, and the possibility that the AtriClip device may not fully exclude the left atrial appendage. The use intra-operative echocardiographic guidance and thoracoscopic instruments help to mitigate such adverse events.

What are the risks of the procedure?

VATS AtriClip left atrial appendage closure is a state-of-the-art procedure to reduce the risk of stroke in patients with AF, when blood thinning medications (anticoagulants) are not safe to use.

Arrange a consult with Dr He to find out if this is the right treatment option for you or your patients.

Dr Cheng He is a Gold Coast Cardiothoracic (Heart and Lung) Surgeon (FRACS qualified) with private and public appointments.

