What is Electrical Cardioversion?

Cardioversion is a procedure used in an attempt to get your heart rhythm back to normal. It is a safe procedure which is carried out in a monitored setting.

Why is it done?
The heart of a patient with atrial fibrillation does not beat effectively. The two top chambers, the atria, are shaking instead of squeezing. Cardioversion is done to return your top chambers to a normal regular rhythm.

How is it done?
First, you will be attached to a heart monitor and an IV will be started. Next, two sticky pads will be applied to your chest wall. You will receive oxygen through a little nasal cannula. Medications will then be given through your IV to make you sleepy. Once you are asleep, an electrical shock is delivered to your heart. You will remain asleep for approximately 10 minutes. In most instances, patients remember nothing.

Why do I have to take a blood thinner before the cardioversion?
When the top chambers of your heart shake, it is possible a blood clot may form. Blood thinners such as Coumadin® help prevent blood clots from forming. This may help prevent a stroke.

How do I get ready for a cardioversion?
• You will need someone to drive you to the hospital.
• You will be asked to sign a consent form.
• Any medication changes will be discussed with you, otherwise take your medicines with a tiny sip of water before coming for your procedure. Bring your list of medications with you to the hospital
• An EKG and some blood work may be necessary before your procedure.
• You will be given specific instructions about eating and drinking.

How long does the cardioversion take?
The cardioversion takes a few minutes. After the cardioversion, you will be watched for up to two hours before you go home or back to your hospital room.

Call your doctor if:
• You feel lightheaded, faint or your pulse returns to a constant irregular heart beat.

Call 911 if you have:
• Changes in vision or speech or weakness in the face, arms or legs.

What is my follow-up care?
You will be given all your discharge instructions in writing including follow-up appointments and medication instructions.