SPEAKER 1: For thousands of people with a common heart condition, the problem isn't what they feel. It's really what they don't feel.

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, in fact, potentially dangerous symptoms can actually go on undetected for years.

SPEAKER 1: But now, ABC 7 news anchor Eric Thomas reports doctors at one Bay Area hospital are turning to a new device to spot trouble before it starts.

ERIC THOMAS: In a small room at John Muir Medical Center in Concord, Susan Pemberton is getting ready to undergo treatment for a condition she didn't even know she had.

SUSAN PEMBERTON: No, I don't feel it at all. The doctor had to tell me that I was in A-fib.

ERIC THOMAS: Susan suffers from atrial fibrillation. It's an irregular heartbeat that can cause symptoms ranging from shortness of breath to an elevated heart rate or in a significant number of cases like Susan's, no symptoms at all. But cardiac specialist Dr. Susan Eisenberg says even patients who are asymptomatic can be in danger of serious heart damage.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: The problem is whether you have symptoms or not your risk for stroke and heart failure still exists.

ERIC THOMAS: Two years ago, San Francisco 49er head coach, Jim Harbaugh, underwent treatment for the same condition. But Dr. Eisenburg says diagnosing and treating a patient without symptoms presents challenges.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: We can't tell if the medication that we're giving or the ablation that we might perform has been effective if the patient can't tell us.

ERIC THOMAS: So the John Muir team turned to a miniaturized device known as the Reveal. It's designed to track a patient's heartbeat 24 hours a day in much the same way as a traditional monitor. But instead of being worn on the chest, the Reveal is implanted in the patient's body.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: You doing OK?

ERIC THOMAS: Before implanting the device, Dr. Eisenberg will coax Susan's heart back into rhythm with a cardioversion, a common technique that applies a short jolt of electricity.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: Clear, please. Sign is rhythm. Great.

ERIC THOMAS: After confirming that Susan's heartbeat is back to normal, Dr. Eisenberg inserts the monitor using a small probe. The procedure takes less than five minutes. And when it's finished, the patient won't feel or see the device. But by using the equivalent of a cell signal, the reveal will transmit data about Susan's heart for up to three years.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: And literally can be programmed by the physician to tell the doctor whatever information it is that they need.

ERIC THOMAS: She says the monitor will let them know if the effect of the cardioversion wears off. The next treatment would be cardiac ablation, a surgical procedure which disables the nerves responsible for the irregular heartbeat.

DR. SUSAN EISENBERG: And this implanted device is going to give us great information about whether the drugs are working or whether the ablation is working with really no discomfort whatsoever to her.

ERIC THOMAS: For Susan, the short-term benefits begin with peace of mind.

SUSAN PEMBERTON: It's going to give me freedom because I won't have to worry if I'm in A-fib or not. It'll just let the doctor know if I am.

ERIC THOMAS: Eric Thomas, ABC 7 News.