

Permanent Pacemaker

Post-implant guide

Information for patients

Introduction

You have been provided with this pack to provide information about the pacemaker which you have had implanted during your stay at hospital. We hope this should answer some questions for you regarding life with your new device, however if you have any further queries feel free to discuss these with a Cardiac Physiologist at your follow up centre.

Phone numbers have also been provided in this booklet if you need to get in touch with a member of staff regarding your pacemaker. Alongside this booklet, within this pack you will find:

- An ID card with information about your pacemaker
- British Heart Foundation patient information booklet
- MedicAlert information booklet
- A home monitoring set-up guide specific to your device manufacturer (if you are an NHS Lothian or NHS Borders patient. All other Health Boards will discuss home monitoring with you at your first appointment).

General information

You have been implanted with a permanent pacemaker. This is normally because you have a slow heart rate (known as 'bradycardia'), which may have been making you feel dizzy, or could have caused you to collapse.

- The primary function of your pacemaker is to prevent your heart rate from dropping below a set value if necessary. The pacemaker cannot treat fast heart rhythms and your own heart rate can still increase above the programmed rate, so do not be alarmed if you take your pulse and find that it is not at the set rate of your pacemaker.
- Some people will have a pacemaker implanted and rarely ever use it, while some may be more reliant on their pacemaker to maintain a suitable heart rate. This all depends on why you had a pacemaker fitted and what your own heart rate and rhythm is.
- Your pacing system consists of a pulse generator (the battery) and pacing leads, of which there may be one, two or three.

For the next 6 weeks we advise that you avoid large movements with your arm on the same side as your device – avoid lifting this arm above your head or lifting any heavy objects. This is to ensure your new device and leads are able to settle in place. It is recommended, however, that you do continue to use this arm for everyday activities (such as eating or drinking) in order to avoid developing a frozen shoulder.

Your device ID card

The ID card provided is specific to you. It contains information about your device as well as contact numbers for the hospital. It may be helpful to photocopy the ID card and keep the original safe with your passport. Please carry a copy with you in your purse/wallet at all times.

Follow up

You will be seen at the devices clinic in approximately 6-8 weeks time. At this appointment you will see a Cardiac Physiologist who will perform a full check of your new device, and will also have a look at your wound to ensure that it has healed. They will also be happy to answer any questions that you may have about your pacemaker. After this you will normally be seen at the hospital once every year.

Home monitoring

You will also have been given a home monitoring device which is capable of detecting any issues with your pacemaker – it is important that you keep this turned on all the time. There is a separate leaflet enclosed in this pack which explains the use of your home monitoring device in more detail.

- It is important that you attend any scheduled appointments or inform your follow-up centre if you are unable to attend so that the appointment can be rescheduled.

Wound information

The wound on your chest will have been closed using absorbable stitches. These will slowly dissolve and do not need to be removed – doing so would allow your wound to open and could lead to infection. If after the first 4 weeks you find that a small part of a stitch sticks out or does not dissolve fully, then you can get this removed by a nurse at your GP surgery, or at your follow-up hospital during your first check at 6-8 weeks after the implant surgery.

- If there are any small adhesive strips over the wound they should also be left in place for 7 days, after which they can be removed by yourself or a relative/carer.

Showering/bathing

The dressing covering your wound should be kept as dry as possible. It is fine to have a shower however you must wash around the area and do not stand directly under the shower head. After 3 days this dressing can be removed by yourself or a relative/carer. The wound should not need re-dressing and it is best to wear a loose fitting top for the first few days after the dressing is removed.

Pain and bruising

It is normal for the area over the device to feel tender for a couple of weeks after your implant surgery, with bruising normally fading within two to three weeks.

Infection

Signs of infection include redness, swelling or discharge at the wound, or increasing pain more than one week after the operation. It is also possible for the area to feel hot to touch compared to the surrounding skin. If you experience any of these symptoms it is important that you contact your follow-up centre as soon as you notice them – do not wait until your next appointment.

Devices which can interfere with your pacemaker

Certain electronic devices are capable of interfering with your device and so precautions should be taken. These include:

- **Mobile phones:** We recommend that mobile phones are kept at least 15cm (six inches) away from your device. Please avoid keeping your phone in front of your device (e.g. in a front shirt pocket). It is also advisable to try to use the ear on the opposite side to your device when talking on the phone.
- **Anti-theft devices:** These are often located at the entrance to shops, it is safe to go through these however it is advised that you do not stop and stand near them for a prolonged period of time.
- **Microwaves:** It is recommended that you do not stand directly in front of your microwave whilst food is cooking, simply place your food in and stand elsewhere in the kitchen until it is finished.
- **Induction hobs:** Despite rumours that you cannot use induction hobs if you have a cardiac device implanted, it is safe to do so providing you keep a distance of 30cm (twelve inches) between the device and the hob. We recommend that you use the back rings of the hob first to help achieve this distance.
- **Magnets:** Avoid close or prolonged contact with industrial magnets or their magnetic fields. Keep magnets at least 15cm (six inches) from your device. Small magnets such as fridge magnets or those found in toys will not cause any harm to your pacemaker.
- **Machinery:** Some occupations involve equipment which may interfere with your device, e.g. Power-generating equipment and arc welding equipment. If you are involved in the use of such equipment, you should discuss this with your doctor.

Driving

Having a pacemaker implanted is considered a 'notifiable condition' and you must tell the DVLA.

- If you hold a group 1 driving licence (car or motorcycle), the DVLA state that you cannot drive for a week after having your pacemaker implanted. After a week you may begin driving again, providing you feel well enough to do so, your doctor is in agreement, and you do not have any other conditions which would prevent you from driving.
- For a group 2 licence (bus and lorry), the DVLA state that must wait 6 weeks after having your pacemaker implanted before driving again – please seek further advice from your doctor.

Full details of driving restrictions can be viewed at www.gov.uk/guidance/cardiovascular-disorders-assessing-fitness-to-drive

Exercise

Although precautions should be taken regarding your level of activity immediately after implantation, your pacemaker should not prevent you from engaging in regular exercise.

We recommend that you avoid strenuous activity for at least two weeks after device implantation. After this time period, where you may find yourself relatively inactive compared to normal, it is recommended that you build up your level of exercise over 2-3 weeks in order to avoid injury.

- Activities which involve large arm movements (e.g. swimming, golf) should be avoided for 6 weeks
- Contact sports are not advisable as the impact with other players or the ground has the potential to cause damage to your device.

If you have any concerns or questions about specific activities please feel free to discuss this with the Cardiac Physiologist at your clinic appointment.

Travel

When going on holiday, make sure to take your ID card with you. This is important in case you need to attend a hospital whilst away from home. You will also need it for going through airport security.

When going through security at airports, show your ID card to the security staff so that they can decide how they want to perform your security check given that you have a pacemaker in place. It is preferable to not go through the 'old-fashioned' arched security scanner but the modern body scanners are absolutely safe.



- You will need to inform your travel insurance company that you have a pacemaker. This should not stop you from getting travel insurance, though some companies are more understanding of cardiac conditions than others.

Hospital admissions

If you have to be admitted to hospital, it is important that you inform the medical staff that you have a pacemaker in place. They may want to know what type of device you have, which is why it is important to carry your ID card with you at all times.

Surgical procedures

If you need to go for surgery, it may be necessary to have your pacemaker temporarily reprogrammed during the procedure. This can be done using a programmer (the same as when you have your device checked in clinic) or by having a magnet taped over your device for the duration of the procedure. This is standard practice to ensure that the equipment used during your surgery does not interfere with your pacemaker and prevent it from delivering pacing signals to your heart. As long as the medical team are aware that you have a pacemaker, they will make the necessary arrangements.

Dental procedures

It is also important that you inform dental staff of your pacemaker if you need to go for a dental procedure.

Going for an x-ray or a scan

Going for an X-ray or CT scan will not have any effect on your pacemaker. If you need an MRI scan please inform the doctor who is requesting the scan, that you have a pacemaker. They will then get in touch with your follow-up centre beforehand to check if your device is safe to go through an MRI scanner (MRI compatible).

Contact numbers

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	0131 242 1814
Western General Hospital (Edinburgh)	0131 537 1852
St John's Hospital (Livingston)	01506 523 851
Borders General Hospital	01896 826 579
Forth Valley Hospital	01324 566 973
Victoria Hospital (Kirkcaldy)	01592 648 031
Ninewells Hospital (Dundee)	01382 632 359

If you need to contact a member of the team urgently out of hours (over the weekend/overnight/public holidays):

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	Call 0131 536 1000 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
Western General Hospital (Edinburgh)	Call 0131 536 1000 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
St John's Hospital (Livingston)	Call 0131 536 1000 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
Borders General Hospital	Call 01896 826 000 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
Forth Valley Hospital	Call 01324 566 000 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
Victoria Hospital (Kirkcaldy)	Call 01592 648 022 and ask for Coronary Care Unit
Ninewells Hospital (Dundee)	Call 01382 632 359 and ask for Coronary Care Unit