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Cardioversion



A procedure to help correct abnormal heart rhythms

This leaflet has been written to provide information about a procedure to help correct abnormal heart rhythms (Cardioversion). We hope it answers some of the questions or concerns you may have about the procedure. It is not intended to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

What is a Cardioversion?

A Cardioversion refers to the process of restoring the heart to a normal rhythm from an abnormal rhythm. There are two types of Cardioversion, chemical and electrical. Most Cardioversions are performed to treat an abnormal heart rhythm called Atrial Fibrillation.

Chemical Cardioversion involves the use of drugs to restore normal heart rhythm.

Electrical Cardioversion is a procedure where an electric shock is delivered to the chest wall to restore normal heart rhythm.

How is electrical Cardioversion done?

You will usually be given a general anaesthetic and therefore will be asleep during the procedure. Special electrodes or paddles are applied to the skin on your chest. An electric shock is delivered through the chest wall to the heart with the purpose of interrupting the abnormal heart rhythm and restoring a normal rhythm.

Will I have any pain following the procedure?

You may experience some minor chest discomfort or skin irritation following the procedure. You must inform the staff if you are in any pain.

How long does the procedure take?

The procedure usually takes about 10 minutes although it only takes a few minutes to deliver the electric shock.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

Prior to procedure you will be given drugs to thin your blood. It is important that you remember to take the drugs regularly on the run up to the procedure as failure to do so can result in your procedure being cancelled. If the drug you are taking is warfarin you will need regular weekly blood tests to check the clotting time of your blood.

Fasting guidelines prior to your procedure

You will be instructed when to stop eating or drinking on your admission letter. It is most important to note that you should fast for the specific length of time stated in the letter and not for a shorter or longer period of time. This is to ensure you have a safe procedure.

If you fast for too short a time it may result in your procedure being postponed or cancelled. If you fast for a longer period of time this may result in you becoming dehydrated (too little fluid in the body) which can lead to complications during or after your procedure.

For example - if your letter asks you to fast from midnight – it is safe to eat and drink up until this time therefore you can have a snack and a drink after your evening meal or before you go to bed.

If you have any queries regarding the length of time you need to fast please contact your consultant's secretary, the number will be given on your admission letter.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

Some abnormal heart rhythms result in the heart not pumping blood as effectively. This may lead to blood clots forming and may increase the chance of having a stroke.

Some people are not aware of their abnormal heart rhythm while others may have symptoms such as shortness of breath,

fast heart rates and tiredness. These symptoms may improve following the procedure.

Will it work?

This depends on the type of abnormal heart rhythm and how long you have had it. The procedure is often successful at restoring a normal heart rhythm although abnormal rhythms can reoccur. If this happens you may need to have the procedure repeated.

What are the risks involved?

There is a small risk of a blood clot becoming dislodged during the procedure, which could lead to a heart attack or stroke. Taking drugs to thin the blood prior to the procedure will help to prevent this.

You may experience slight skin irritation after the procedure.

Any risks involved with the procedure will be discussed in more detail before you sign a consent form.

What alternatives do I have?

There are many drugs available that work well at controlling certain abnormal heart rhythms.