

Information for Patients & Families

Having a Pacemaker Inserted



This leaflet has been written to provide information about having a permanent pacemaker inserted. 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 pacemaker?

A pacemaker is a device designed to help maintain or regulate your heart rate.

Pacemakers are sometimes recommended for people with slow heart rates, irregular heart rates or even heart block.

The pacemaker works by producing an electrical impulse, which stimulates the heart to beat.

There are a wide variety of pacemakers available. Your doctor will discuss which type of pacemaker is appropriate for individual heart conditions.

How is the pacemaker implanted?

You will normally be awake during the procedure but you will be given a local anaesthetic to numb the skin. Sometimes however, a general anaesthetic may be used.

A small cut is made below your left or right collarbone. Wires are passed along a vein to your heart and positioned according to your individual condition. The wires are then attached to the pacemaker battery that is positioned just below your skin. When your doctor is happy that the pacemaker is in the right place the wound is closed using dissolvable stitches or a special type of glue.

Will I have any pain during the procedure?

You will be given a local anaesthetic to numb the area. You will feel some movement as the pacemaker and leads are inserted and your doctor and theatre staff will monitor you continuously to ensure you are as comfortable as possible. The staff will attempt

to minimise pain as much as possible by using sedative drugs and pain killers as required. However, if you suffer significant pain or find the procedure unpleasant then you should inform staff immediately. The level of pain that patient's experience does vary from feeling nothing at all or minimal pain to significant pain and unfortunately this cannot be predicted. If you do find the procedure uncomfortable and experience pain then you should inform the staff immediately.

How long does the procedure take?

The procedure usually take approximately an hour, on occasion this can sometimes take a little longer.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

You may be asked to attend a pre admission clinic prior to the procedure. You will have various tests and meet with a nurse practitioner who will talk to you about the procedure and discuss any questions.

Staff on the ward will ensure you have had the appropriate investigations when you are admitted for the procedure and prepare your chest for theatre using an antiseptic solution.

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 having the procedure?

Having an irregular, or slow or fast heart rate can cause breathlessness, fainting or blackouts and can reduce blood flow. Having a pacemaker inserted may improve or prevent these symptoms.

Some people have a very slow heart rate which could be life threatening if left untreated.

Many people find that having a pacemaker allows them to get back to normal life or improves their quality of life.

What are the risks involved?

This is a common procedure and is usually very safe.

As with all procedures there are risks involved, and there a small risk of infection at the time the pacemaker is fitted.

There is also a risk of bleeding an bruising around the site of implantation and a risk of the lead becoming displaced.

There is also a small risk of lung collapse (pneumothorax) during the procedure. If this happens you may require treatment to reinflate the lung.

Any risk involved with the procedure will discussed with you in more detail before you sign a consent form to proceed with the procedure.

What alternatives do I have?

This depends on individual heart conditions.

There are many drugs available that work well at reducing heart rate or irregular rhythms.

Radiofrequency ablation is a procedure used to correct certain abnormal heart rhythms. The procedure involves applying radiofrequency to the area of the heart that is responsible for the abnormal electrical signal. Your doctor would be happy to discuss any alternative treatments if they are applicable to your particular case.

What can I expect after the procedure?

Once the procedure is finished you will be taken back to the ward. You will need to rest in bed for a few hours. You must restrict your arm movements on the side that the pacemaker has been fitted. Your blood pressure, heart rate and wound site will be checked regularly. You will be able to eat and drink unless you require further tests.

Following the procedure you will have a chest x-ray and have your pacemaker checked to make sure it is working correctly.

When can I resume normal activities?

You will usually be able to go home later the same day. You will be given a pacemaker registration card which you must carry with you and show to any medical professionals that are treating you.

You must not drive for one week, after which you can start driving again provided you do not have any symptoms. If you have a large goods licence you will not be able to drive for 6 weeks. You must inform the DVLA that you have a pacemaker.

You should not lift heavy objects for two weeks and restrict moving your arms above your head on the side that the pacemaker has been fitted.

Looking after the wound

You will be given important information on how to care for the wound after you leave hospital and what to do if you notice any redness, swelling or discharge from the pacemaker site.

This advice will be discussed in more detail before you go home and you will be given a discharge advice sheet.

For further information visit:

www.lhch.nhs.uk

www.amplatzer.com

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

www.bhf.org.uk

Or contact the British heart foundation information line on
0845 070 80 70

If you require a copy of this leaflet in any other format or language please contact us quoting the leaflet code and the language or format you require.

إذا لديك الرغبة في الحصول على نسخة من هذه المعلومات بأي لغة أخرى أو بشكل آخر (على سبيل المثال بخطوط كبيرة) ، الرجاء الاتصال علينا على الرقم 0151 600 1257 موضحاً الشكل أو اللغة التي ترغب فيها.
如果您想索取一份以其他語文或形式（如大字體）編印成的資料傳單，請致電 0151 600 1257 向我們查詢，並說明您所需要的形式和語文。
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W celu uzyskania niniejszej informacji w innym języku lub formacie (np. dużym drukiem), prosimy o kontakt z nami pod numerem 0151 600 1257 podając wymagany format lub język.
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