

Understanding Your Pacemaker

You and your doctor have discussed the need for a permanent pacemaker. This information will help explain:

- What a pacemaker is
- How it can help you
- What follow-up care is needed

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While in the hospital, you can watch a pacemaker video on the Patient TV system. Ask your nurse for details.

After discharge the same video can be viewed in the Health Learning Center (3rd floor, Galter Pavilion).

The pacemaker is a device that can protect you against certain abnormal heart rhythms by constantly monitoring your heart. The pacemaker is able to detect a slow heart rhythm (bradycardia) and produce electrical impulses to increase your heart rate. If your heartbeat is too slow, there is not enough blood pumped to meet your body's needs. This may make you feel tired, weak, lightheaded or short of breath. A pacemaker restores the proper heart rate and rhythm.

Usually the pacemaker is implanted in the upper chest area just below the collarbone. The pacemaker is very small in size, with most weighing an ounce or less. The pacemaker consists of a pulse generator (a battery and an electrical circuit) and a lead wire. The wire or pacing lead is threaded through a vein leading to the heart. The lead carries information about your heart rhythm back to the generator. It also is used to transmit needed electrical impulses to the heart. The leads and the generator are connected after proper placement is confirmed. The doctor will program the pacemaker to best fit your specific needs.

Pacemaker Placement

You will be asked not to eat or drink for several hours before the procedure. Before your procedure, you will be asked to remove eyeglasses or contact lenses and any jewelry.

The pacemaker placement takes about 2 hours and is done in the Electrophysiology Lab. You will receive sedation to make you comfortable during surgery. You then will go to a cardiac monitoring unit to recover. You will remain on bedrest for about 6 hours. Your pacemaker will be checked the next day to see that it is working properly. Before your discharge, a chest X-ray will be done, follow-up appointments will be made and your instructions will be reviewed.

Life with Your Pacemaker at Home

At home you will need time to recover from the surgery. It is important for you to listen to your body and rest when you feel tired, follow a proper diet and follow up with your doctor for scheduled appointments. After you recover, you may resume your normal activities with a few restrictions that your doctor will explain.

Incision Care

- Notify your surgeon if you develop any of these signs of infection:
 - Fever greater than 100° F
 - Redness, swelling or tenderness at the incision site
 - Drainage from the incision site
- Showering is not permitted until after the wound check appointment one week after surgery.
- Allow Steri-Strips,[®] the clear strips of tape covering your wound, to fall off naturally.
- Protect your incisions from the sun to avoid sunburn and decrease scarring.

Activity Guidelines

- You will be given instructions about driving at your one week follow-up appointment. Most often driving is allowed after 1 to 6 weeks.
- Exercise is encouraged. It is important to start slowly and progress gradually. You can check your heart rate by taking your pulse before and after exercise. Be sure to rest when you are tired. There are many benefits to a regular exercise program. Talk with your doctor to see what options are best for you.
- You should avoid exercise or activity that could result in blunt blows to the pacemaker site, such as contact sports.

- You should avoid lifting objects over 10 lbs. (groceries, laundry, children, etc.) until six weeks after surgery.
- You should avoid activities involving stretching and/or reaching movements with your affected arm for 6 weeks after your surgery (such as golf or tennis).
- Avoid swimming for 6 weeks until the incision is completely healed to decrease the risk of infections.
- Avoid dental work for three months after the implant.

Magnets and Electrical Devices

Normal use of properly operating household appliances should not damage your pacemaker. Using electric arc welders or working on automobile ignition systems also will not damage your pacemaker. But, they can interfere with the pacemaker function. If you are using electrical equipment or working around running motors and you become lightheaded or feel palpitations, turn the equipment off or walk away from it. Normal pacemaker function should resume.

It is important to notify all of your doctors that you have a pacemaker. If there are any questions concerning your pacemaker and specific tests you need, we can provide you with further information.

Follow Up Care

After your pacemaker is implanted, you will be followed closely by your doctor to assure that it is working properly. Your follow-up will be done through the pacemaker clinic. The pacemaker may be re-programmed to fit your needs. Examining and adjusting the pacemaker is quick and painless. Your pacemaker will last up to 10 years. This varies according to how often it is used and how it is programmed. Part of your follow-up involves checking the battery life of your device. It is very important that you keep your appointments.

Appointments

One week after your surgery, you will need to come back to the hospital for a wound check. Your wound check appointment is: _____

This visit will take about 15 minutes. The doctors also may decide to take a chest X-ray.

For the first few months you must have your pacemaker checked over the telephone, depending on the type of pacemaker. You will be given the needed equipment and instructions. The pacemaker will be checked every 2 weeks for the first 3 months. If your pacemaker is not checked by phone, you will come to the Pacemaker Clinic in 1 month. All pacemakers will be checked in 3 months at the Pacemaker Clinic.

The clinic is located at 675 N. St. Clair, 19th Floor, Suite 100. The Pacemaker Clinic phone number is 312-695-8663. After this visit, you will be seen once every 6 months in the Pacemaker Clinic.

For further information about your pacemaker, feel free to call the Pacemaker Clinic nurse at 312-695-8663.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

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Developed by: Electrophysiology Nursing Staff

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For more information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit www.nmh.org.

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