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Sherwood Forest Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Living with your Pacemaker

**Information for patients**



# Living with your pacemaker

A pacemaker is a small device which usually sits beneath the surface of the skin in the chest area below the shoulder. It is attached to electrodes or wires which are implanted to the heart through a vein to help to regulate the rate and rhythm. This prevents the heart from beating too slowly and can also keep the chambers of the heart beating in synchrony with each other.

Your pacemaker will have been programmed to the settings appropriate for your heart rhythm condition and has been set to work on demand to enable your own heart to work as much as possible on its own. This is quite normal and is better for your heart.

You should not be aware of the pacemaker working. However, if you feel body or muscle twitching you should contact the pacemaker clinic. The telephone numbers are at the end of this leaflet.

The pacemaker will not stop the heart from speeding up so if you experience fast heart rates or palpitations this can be treated by medicines by your doctor. Please contact the Pacemaker Clinic or your GP practice for advice.

**After your initial check between two to six weeks, you will be seen in the Pacemaker Clinic for a three month post implant check. Following this visit you will be required to attend at least once a year for a battery and lead checks.**

## Wound care

After the pacemaker is implanted you may have a pressure dressing over the plaster and you may wear a sling restricting all movement of the arm on the side of your pacemaker for 48 hours only.

After two days this can be removed. You can sleep or lie on your left side if comfortable. Please avoid wearing a seatbelt on the same side as your implantable device for the first 10 days. Following this you can wear a seat belt on either side.

You will have received an appointment to have your stitches removed 10 – 14 days after your implant. Please leave your dressing in place until your first routine wound review at the Cardiac Catheter Suite. Your wound site should be kept clean and dry until it has fully healed. Do not get the dressing or device site wet until all scabs have fallen off naturally from the wound.

It can take up to six weeks until the wound is fully healed. Avoid wearing tight clothing over the area. **If you notice any weeping or oozing, pain or heat, excessive bruising or redness, or you can see the device, please contact either the Cardiac Catheter Suite or Pacemaker Clinic as soon as possible. The numbers can be found at the end of this leaflet. Do not go to your GP with any problems with your pacemaker wound.**

## Exercising/moving

Once your sling is removed, you need to restrict movement in the arm on the same side as your pacemaker for six weeks after the pacemaker is implanted. **Do not lift your arm above shoulder level and avoid heavy lifting.** This gives the tissue in the heart time to grow around the pacemaker leads to secure it to the heart wall and allows your wound site time to heal completely. To avoid the risk of getting a frozen shoulder, small frequent general movements are beneficial. You are able to push up from a bed or chair as long as this movement does not require you to lift your arm higher than shoulder height. You can weight bear – use a walking frame or any other walking aid that doesn't require you to lift your arm up.

A certain level of exercise is good to keep you healthy. It is advised however, to avoid strenuous activity in the first six weeks after the pacemaker implant. Please talk to the team at the Pacemaker Clinic if you have concerns about physical activity.

It is advisable to avoid contact sports to minimise the risk of damaging your pacemaker.

## ID information

You should have received a pacemaker identity card **and you should always carry this with you** or you may want to save a copy to your mobile phone. This has details of the make and model of your pacemaker. If you require any further medical treatment in the future it is important that you show this information to the healthcare professionals treating you. If you have not received this card, please let a member of the pacemaker team know so that this can be either sent to you by post or given to you at the Pacemaker Clinic.

Some people may like to purchase a Medic Alert and we have provided you with some information in this pack.

## Mobile phones

It is recommended that you do not keep a mobile phone in a coat or shirt pocket over the pacemaker. Keep the handset more than six inches away from the pacemaker; ideally hold the phone over the ear on the opposite side to the device.

## Medications

Keep records of what medications you take and **always bring a list of medications to all your appointments.**

## Driving with a pacemaker

The Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) have guidelines in relation to patients who require a pacemaker and whether or not they are safe to drive.

There will be some restrictions, but these will vary depending on why you have had your pacemaker fitted. It is very important that you discuss this with your nurse, physiologist or doctor at your appointment in the Pacemaker Clinic who will explain this in more detail.

You must inform the DVLA and your insurance company that you have had a pacemaker implanted.

## Using household appliances and equipment with a pacemaker

Electromagnetic interference will not damage your pacemaker but may temporarily interfere with its settings while you are in contact with it.

Most mechanical and electrical devices that you use in your normal daily activities will not affect your pacemaker.

Household equipment such as ordinary radios, fridges, cookers, remote controls, televisions, electric razors, computers and microwaves etc. will not affect your pacemaker as long as they are in good working order. In the case where you ever feel dizzy or experience palpitations while using an electrical appliance, you should move away from the appliance and phone the physiologist in Pacemaker Clinic for advice.

## **Medical equipment**

It is important to always mention to any doctors, nurses or dentists that you have a pacemaker before undergoing any investigations or procedures. Please take your pacemaker ID card with you whenever you go to hospital.

Most equipment used by your hospital or GP surgery will not cause any problems to your pacemaker. It is safe for you to have x-rays, CT scans and mammograms.

Some pacemakers are MRI conditional which means that they have been demonstrated to pose no known hazards in a specified MRI environment with specified conditions of use. If your doctor requires you to have an MRI scan please speak to the Pacemaker Clinic (clinic 4) to check that your device is MRI conditional.

Some electrical nerve and muscle stimulators (TENS units) may cause interference with pacemakers but this depends on where they are being applied.

If any of these treatments are suggested to you should contact the Pacemaker Clinic for advice.

## Magnets

Do not carry magnets or place a magnet over your chest. Avoid carrying stereo or hi-fi speakers as they contain strong magnets that can interfere with your pacemaker.

## Arc welding

Generally, this should be avoided but can be performed under special circumstances. Please ask at your clinic visit for advice.

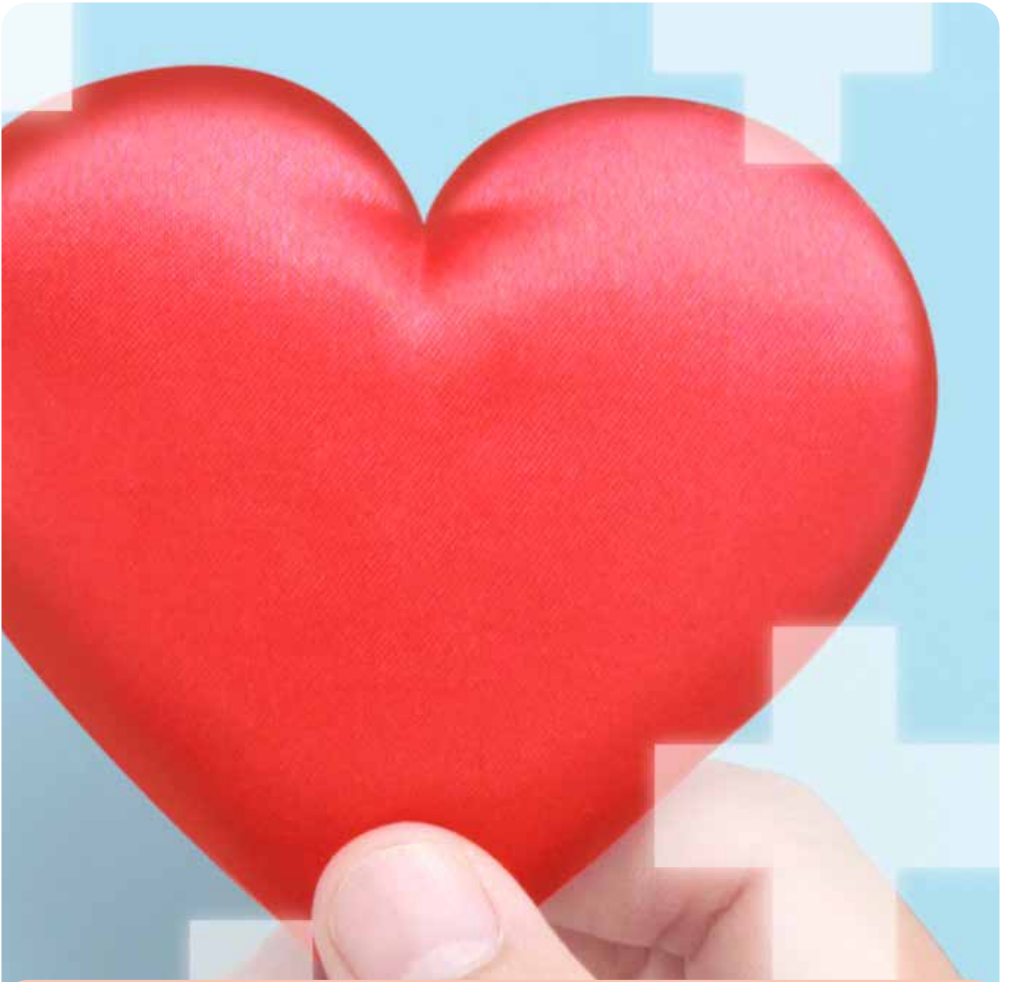
## Pacemaker Clinic visits

**Your pacemaker should be checked regularly and you will receive a letter to attend the Pacemaker Clinic as required. You will be seen at least once a year and may be asked to attend more often if necessary.**

During each clinic visit, the physiologist will examine your pacemaker and wound site. They will use a specific programmer for your device to allow them to examine the settings and the battery life of your device as well as the condition of the leads that connect the pacemaker to your heart. Changes may be made to the pacemaker settings if necessary.

At these visits please also take this opportunity to ask any questions or let the pacemaker team know if you have any problems or worries.

**Please also bring a list of your current medication.**



## **Changing the pacemaker**

Normally a pacemaker battery lasts between six and 13 years. Your battery will be checked at every visit to the Pacemaker Clinic and staff at the clinic will be able to predict when you need a replacement.

Don't worry, it will not be allowed to completely run down. You will be seen more regularly and an appropriate time for replacement will be scheduled.

You will need to attend the hospital for the day for the procedure which is similar to having your first pacemaker fitted. It will not usually involve having new leads.

## **Travel**

You can safely travel abroad with your pacemaker providing that there are no other medical conditions preventing you from doing so. You are advised to show the security staff your identification card. The metal casing of the pacemaker may set off the airport security alarm. The detector will not cause any harm to your pacemaker provided you walk briskly through the arch.

You will need to make sure that your travel insurance company is aware that you have a pacemaker.

# To summarise

## For the first six weeks DO NOT:

- Carry or lift anything heavy.
- Raise your arm/elbow above shoulder height.
- Fiddle with the device. This could move the leads which are inside the heart, which would then need to be repositioned.
- Stand in security gates in shops or airport security. However, if you have to go through security in airports/border controls please inform staff that you have a pacemaker and be prepared to show your pacemaker identity leaflet.

## Do:

- Take the full course of antibiotics if these have been prescribed.
- Take all other medications as instructed by your doctor.
- Attend the Cardiac Catheter Suite for a wound check and suture removal on \_\_\_\_\_

- Leave your dressing in place until the appointment for your wound check.
- Restart warfarin/apixaban/rivoroxaban /edoxaban/dabigatran

on \_\_\_\_\_

- dose of \_\_\_\_\_

with INR check \_\_\_\_\_

- Live a normal life and don't forget to keep your appointments with us in clinic.
- Refrain from driving until \_\_\_\_\_
- Remove your pressure dressing on \_\_\_\_\_

## Telephone numbers

- **Pacemaker Clinic at King's Mill Hospital – 01623 672259.**
- **Cardiac Catheter Suite at King's Mill Hospital – 01623 672424.**
- **In an emergency contact the Pacemaker Clinic between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.**
- **Outside of working hours please call 999.**

## Useful links

- [www.heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/uk/for-patients](http://www.heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/uk/for-patients)
- [www.patient.info/dvla](http://www.patient.info/dvla)

## **Further sources of information**

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

## **Patient Experience Team (PET)**

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know.

You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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