



The Heart Rhythm Charity

Arrhythmia Alliance  
PO Box 3697  
Stratford upon Avon  
Warwickshire  
CV37 8YL  
+44 (0) 1789 450 787  
[info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](mailto:info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)  
[www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](http://www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)

## Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD)

### What is an ICD?

ICD stands for Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator. If your doctor has suggested that you need an ICD you may have experienced or may be at risk of experiencing an abnormal, fast heart rhythm. An ICD can recognise and monitor your heart rhythm and can deliver various electrical treatments if needed. It is made up of a small, slim, box-shaped device which contains a battery and electronic circuits, usually placed under the skin below your collarbone, normally on the left-hand side.

### Most modern ICDs have three main functions;

If your heart rhythm is too slow, the device can give your heart extra support by working as a normal pacemaker (anti-bradycardia pacing).

If your heart beats too fast, the ICD can give you a burst of extra beats at a slightly faster rate which should return your heart back to a normal rhythm (anti-tachycardia pacing or ATP).

If the anti-tachycardia pacing doesn't bring your heart back to a normal rhythm, or if the ICD senses a faster, dangerous rhythm called Ventricular Fibrillation, the ICD can then give a shock (defibrillation).

### How is the ICD fitted?

This procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic or a local anaesthetic and sedation. The ICD generator is connected to either one or two leads which pass through a vein into the heart. The doctor may test the device during the procedure to ensure it is working correctly. The implant should take between one and two hours and any stitches that may need to be

subsequently removed will be done at your GP surgery.

### What happens after the ICD has been implanted?

You will probably be allowed to go home the next day provided your ICD is checked and there are no complications. You will be given an ICD identity card, emergency information and instructions at this point. You will also be given a helpline number should you have any queries later on.

Normally an ICD battery lasts between six and nine years and the replacement procedure will usually involve changing the ICD generator, not having new leads implanted.

### Will I feel anything different?

Some patients have reported that having shocks can feel like they have been suddenly kicked or punched in the chest. These shocks can be quite painful but the pain will only last for a few seconds, others may not feel anything.

If you do feel unwell after a shock, or if your device has given you several shocks, please dial 999 for an ambulance. Show the paramedics your identity card along with any emergency instructions; this will inform them of exactly which type of device you have and what the best course of action will be.

You should always contact your ICD centre if you think you have had a shock.



The Heart Rhythm Charity

Arrhythmia Alliance  
PO Box 3697  
Stratford upon Avon  
Warwickshire  
CV37 8YL  
+44 (0) 1789 450 787  
[info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](mailto:info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)  
[www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](http://www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)

## Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD)

### What about driving?

There may be some restrictions on driving;  
you can access DVLA guidelines on:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/  
DriverLicensing/MedicalRulesForDrivers/  
index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/MedicalRulesForDrivers/index.htm)

You do not need to inform the DVLA that you have had an ICD implanted if it has been fitted for primary prevention reasons. However you must inform your insurance company.

For further information contact Arrhythmia Alliance



President: Prof A John Camm Trustees: Dr Derek Connelly,  
Mr Nigel Farrell, Dr Adam Fitzpatrick, Mrs Trudie Lobban

Registered Charity No. 1107496 ©2010

Written & Approved by: A-A Executive Committee Published: April 2010



endorsed by  
Department  
of Health