



The Heart Rhythm Charity

Arrhythmia Alliance
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Pacemaker

If your doctor has suggested that you have a pacemaker fitted it is because you have an abnormality in the electrical pathway of your heart which upsets the regular beating of your heart. An artificial pacemaker, which is very small and battery-operated, will treat some of these abnormal heart rhythms and so improve your quality of life. It will be placed just below your collarbone and the majority of patients do not find it to be uncomfortable.

Patients with the following conditions may be offered a pacemaker:

- ♥ Syncope
- ♥ Bradycardia
- ♥ Complete or Intermittent Heart Block
- ♥ Sick Sinus Syndrome
- ♥ Heart Failure

How is a pacemaker fitted?

This procedure is normally performed under a local anaesthetic. You will be sedated to make you relaxed and sleepy. The implant should take between 60 – 90 minutes and any stitches that may need to be subsequently removed, will be done at your GP surgery. It is reassuring to know that serious complications from pacemakers are very unusual.

What happens after the pacemaker is fitted?

You will probably be allowed to go home the same or the next day, provided your pacemaker is checked, there are no complications and your doctor assesses it is safe. You will be given a pacemaker identity card with details of the make and model of your pacemaker. This card should be kept with you at all times. If you require further treatment in the future it is essential that you show the card to the medical professional who is treating you.

Most pacemaker batteries will last 8-12 years, when another small operation is needed to replace the pacemaker box. The battery cannot be replaced alone. The battery, circuits and lead connectors are in one sealed unit. Usually the pacemaker wires last longer than the batteries, but they may need to be replaced every 10-20 years.

Are there any risks associated with the procedure?

There are some small risks associated with having a pacemaker fitted. Generally the most common risks are:

A small risk of infection, bleeding and bruising to the pacemaker site.

A small risk of lead displacement – the pacemaker lead can move and would then need repositioning.

A small risk of perforation of the lung during the procedure.

For further information contact Arrhythmia Alliance



President: Prof A John Camm Trustees: Dr Derek Connelly,
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Will I feel anything different?

You should not be aware of the pacemaker working but occasionally people are conscious of their heart beating faster, particularly if you had a very slow heart rhythm before the pacemaker was implanted.

The pacemaker will not usually stop the heart from speeding up so if you had fast palpitations before then they may continue. If this occurs the palpitations are usually treated by medicine.

The pacemaker will be set to enable your own heart to work as much as possible on its own and will only come in if your heart rhythm slows down to a certain level. It works "on demand".

What about driving?

There will be some restrictions but these will vary depending on why you have had your pacemaker fitted.

You must inform the DVLA that you have had a pacemaker implanted. It is also strongly recommended that you inform your insurance company.

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DrivingLicensing/MedicalRulesForDrivers/index.htm>

Important Information

You should avoid magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines and if you have an appointment to have a test then it is essential you advise the medical staff that you have a pacemaker.

It is also advisable to contact your pacemaker clinic for advice before you go into hospital for investigations or operations that are not associated with your pacemaker.