

Living with a permanent pacemaker to regulate your heart

The aim of this leaflet is to answer any questions you may have about living with a permanent pacemaker. If you have any further questions or concerns please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

When can I go back to my normal activities?

You should be able return to your normal activities as soon as you feel up to it. On the side of your body where the pacemaker has been inserted, you must not lift your arm above shoulder height for at least four weeks. You will also have to avoid lifting, pushing or pulling heavy objects for the first four weeks. Do not be afraid to move your arm normally, as this will prevent your shoulder from becoming stiff. You may feel a little tired or sore at first, so build up slowly to your normal routine.

When can I go back to work?

This depends on your recovery and the type of work that you do. We usually recommend that you take between three and seven days off work, but this can vary. Please follow the advice given by your cardiologist. If you have any concerns about returning to work, please discuss these with any of the medical staff caring for you.

Can I wash my wound?

Your wound will need little care. The stitches will dissolve by themselves after about seven days. Try to keep the area dry during this time. After a week, you can wash once a day with soap and water in the bath or shower. Do not use powders or creams on your wound while it is healing, as these can carry germs.

Will I be in pain?

Your wound and the shoulder where the PPM has been implanted will be uncomfortable for the first few days. When you have returned home, you can take painkillers such as paracetamol, to help with any discomfort. Always follow the directions on the packet, or ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

What kind of exercises can I do?

There are only a few exercise restrictions to keep in mind. For example, avoid contact sports such as judo or football, since they may damage the pacemaker or the leads. Before doing strenuous or repetitive upper-body exercises like weight lifting, speak to your cardiologist, nurse or cardiac physiologist.

Can I travel abroad?

You will need to let your insurance company know that you have a pacemaker. The British Heart Foundation (BHF) has a list of companies that offer travel insurance for people with heart conditions. See page 5 for their contact details.

When you are planning your trip, please take into account the availability of medical care in the country you are visiting. Your pacemaker can be checked and programmed in most major hospitals around the world in an emergency, but you must make sure you carry your pacemaker identification card with you at all times. See page 4 for information on airport security detectors.

Is it possible to dislodge the pacemaker?

Yes, although the pacemaker is firmly fixed in a pocket under your skin and the leads are well secured to the pacemaker. Contact or pressure applied to the pacemaker site should not affect how it works. If you fall or hurt yourself around the pacemaker site, please contact the cardiac physiologists for advice.

How long will my pacemaker last?

The pacemaker is powered by a battery, sealed inside its case. The battery lasts between five and seven years, and is checked at each follow-up (usually between six and twelve months). Your cardiac physiologist will tell you when the battery runs down to a certain level, as you will need to have the pacemaker replaced. This will be done well before the battery runs out completely.

Pacemakers and driving

You must let the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) know that you have had a pacemaker implanted. You can do this by filling out an H1 form, available on the DVLA website (gov.uk) or from the Post Office. You will not be allowed to drive for at least one week following pacemaker implantation, or for at least six weeks if you hold a PCV or HGV license.

If your pacemaker box is changed or revised, you must not drive for one week, or six weeks if you hold a PCV/HGV license.

It is important to remember that these regulations are in place for your safety and other road users. They are constantly being reviewed and updated and may change in the future, but you are required by law to comply with them at all times.

DVLA address:

Drivers Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea SA99 1TU

t: 0300 790 6806

w: www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving

Electrical interference and your pacemaker

Can I use my mobile phone?

Recent studies have suggested that if a mobile phone is held close to a pacemaker (within six inches or 15 cm), the phone may affect the operation of the pacemaker. This could be either because of radio signals produced by the phone, or because the phone contains a magnet.

As there are so many different mobile phones and because patients and their pacemakers will each react differently, it is difficult to provide detailed advice that covers everyone. However, some general guidelines are:

- Keep a mobile phone at least six inches (15 cm) from your pacemaker.
- Hold your phone to the ear on the opposite side of where your pacemaker has been implanted.
- Some phones send out signals when they are turned on but are not being used (for example in the listen or standby mode). Therefore, do not carry the phone in a breast pocket within six inches of your pacemaker.

Can appliances in my house interfere with my pacemaker?

Assuming they are in good condition and properly earthed, you can safely use:

- kitchen appliances, including microwave ovens, dishwashers, electric cookers, refrigerators, washers, dryers
- electric can openers, blenders, toasters, electric knives
- televisions, video recorders, personal computers, AM/FM radios, remote controls and garage door openers
- electric blankets, heating pads
- personal appliances such as curling irons or baby monitors.

You can use the following items, but avoid holding them closer than necessary to your implant site. This is because they contain motors that can create electromagnetic radiation and interfere with your device. Aim to keep them one foot (30cm) away from your pacemaker site:

- hand-held appliances with motors such as hairdryers and shavers
- light shop tools such as drills or table saws
- transmitters for radio-controlled equipment or toys.

If you have any concerns, please contact a member of staff using the numbers on the back page.

It is generally safe to work around spark-ignited internal combustion engines, such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers or cars but limit your exposure to ignition-system parts when they are in operation.

Office equipment

Most office equipment is safe to operate as long as it is properly earthed and in good working order. This includes computers, electric typewriters, fax machines, pagers and copiers.

General precautions

- Any electrical equipment, appliance or machine that you use should be in good working order and should be properly earthed. Watch out for frayed cords or sparks when the equipment is being plugged in or used. If you are unsure, always have a qualified electrician check the equipment.
- Do not carry magnets or products containing magnets close to your pacemaker. Depending on how strong the magnet is, aim to keep it six inches to a foot (15–30cm) away.
- When working with tools or appliances, be careful in situations where you could be injured if you become dizzy or receive a shock from your pacemaker.
- If you have concerns about any specific type of equipment or appliance, please ask us. If we do not know the answer, we will contact the company who made your pacemaker to ask them for specialist advice.

Security systems

The following create electromagnetic fields and can interfere with your pacemaker:

- anti-theft systems or electronic article surveillance (EAS) systems. These are sometimes found at the entrances, exits or checkout counters of stores, libraries and banks. They send out signals that may interact with pacemakers, but it is very unlikely that they will harm you or your device. Make sure you walk through the entrances and exits at a normal pace and do not stay in these areas for long.
- airport security metal detectors. Show security staff your pacemaker identification card. Walking through the metal detector archway will not harm your pacemaker, but it may set off the alarm. Pass through the archway at a normal pace and avoid lingering in the immediate area. The hand-held wand should not be used near your pacemaker.

Industrial equipment

If you work in an environment with large generators, electric motors or other forms of electromagnetic equipment, please speak to your cardiac physiologist when you visit the outpatient department for your pacemaker check. They will then seek specific advice from the manufacturer for your situation. Arc welding is generally not advised.

Medical equipment

Although most medical equipment will have no effect on your ICD, some may affect how it works. **Always tell the doctor or nurse treating you that you have a pacemaker.**

People with pacemakers cannot have MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scans. You can safely have diagnostic x-rays including fluoroscopy, dental and chest X-rays, computed tomography (CT) scans and mammograms. Ultrasonic dental cleaners should not affect your pacemaker.

If you need to use an electrical nerve and muscle stimulator (TENS unit), please contact the cardiac physiologists for advice.

Recreation

Amusement park rides (and IMAX theatres) should not affect your pacemaker, but be cautious of rides that have large sparks, such as bumper cars. Tanning beds should not affect your pacemaker, but remember that tanning beds give out ultraviolet (UV) rays, which can cause skin cancer. Do not touch the antenna of an operating CB or ham radio.

My spouse/family member is the patient. How can I help?

If a family member or friend is the patient, it is natural for you to have the same fears and worries. There are several things that can help both of you cope with the condition. For example, listen when they want to talk. Your loved one needs reassurance that they have your support. Encourage and support them to get back to normal activities.

If you have any ongoing problems, or if you or your partner would like any specific information or advice, please discuss them with your doctor. We hold specialist clinics at the hospital, which you can be referred to if necessary – please use the contact details on the back page to get in touch.

Contact us

The Cardiac devices information line – for any questions or concerns you may have about having a pacemaker.

t: 020 7401 9249

m: 07770 581 872 (text messages only)

e: heartdevices@gstt.nhs.uk

You can also contact:

- the nurse case managers on **020 7188 0978**
- or the cardiac rehabilitation team on **020 7188 0946**

They are available on weekdays between 9am and 5pm. If no one is available to take your call, please leave a message on the answerphone. Messages are checked daily and you will be contacted as soon as possible. Out of hours, for **urgent** help only, call your local A&E department for advice.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

BHF provides information on issues relating to heart disease.

Address: Greater London House, 180 Hampstead Road, London NW1 7AW

t: 0207 554 0000 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) **w:** www.bhf.org.uk

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'

t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy's

e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

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