

## Pacemaker

This information sheet is designed to provide information and advice to patients and carers on pacemakers.



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 usually be placed under the skin 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

This condition, which is known as the 'common faint', is not normally serious. However, if the blackout is due to a slow heart rhythm, which not only triggers frequent syncopal attacks but can also cause the heart to stop, then a pacemaker could prevent this.

#### Bradycardia

This is the term given to the condition where the heart beats too slowly. Bradycardia is often age-related and can cause dizziness, fatigue and fainting.

### How is a pacemaker fitted?

This procedure is normally performed under a local anaesthetic. You will usually 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.

Before leaving hospital, ask for a contact telephone number should you need to ask for guidance following your procedure. If you have any concerns about wound recovery, stitches or your pacemaker, contact your pacemaker clinic. Your pacemaker should be checked regularly and you will be invited to attend your pacemaker clinic as required.

Pacemakers can be checked using a radio link from a computer or "Programmer". The settings can be changed, and the status of the battery and wires checked. This is usually done every 6-12 months.

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.



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### How soon before I am back to normal?

You may feel tired for the first few days following the procedure, but you should be able to return to your normal lifestyle within a week.

### What about driving?

You must inform the DVLA that you have had a pacemaker implanted and it is also strongly recommended that you inform your insurance company. Please consult the DVLA for further information on the latest guidelines.

You can usually drive a car a week after the procedure, if your symptoms have resolved.

### 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.



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