

What to expect when having a pacemaker implantation

Cardiology Department



Patient information leaflet

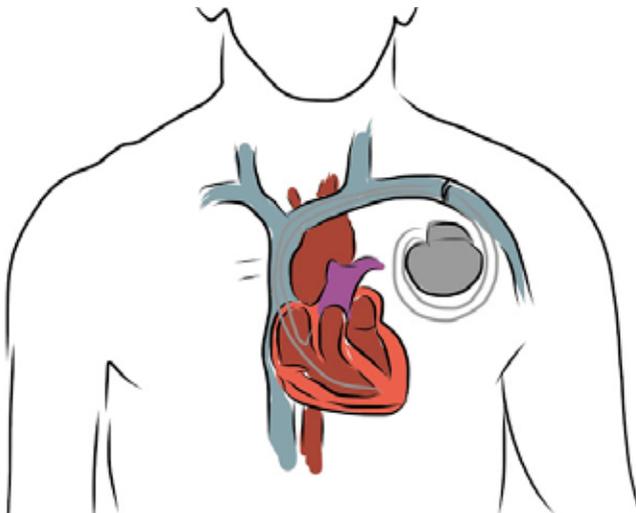
What is a pacemaker?

A pacemaker is a small metal device which contains an electronic circuit and a battery. It is connected to your heart through one or more leads. The pacemaker is placed in a “pocket” underneath your skin, just beneath your collarbone. The pacemaker continuously monitors your heart beat and sends an electrical impulse to the heart if required. This happens whenever your own heart rhythm becomes too slow or irregular. The pacemaker leads are insulated wire that carries the electrical impulse from the pacemaker to the heart. This regulates your heart rhythm.



Why do you need a pacemaker?

One of the most common reasons for a pacemaker implantation is abnormalities in the electrical conduction system of your heart. These abnormalities can cause a slow heart rate which can cause your symptoms. Some of which may include; dizziness, light-headedness, fatigue and fainting episodes (syncope).



Prior to your procedure

If you have not already been screened for MRSA, you must attend the Medical Day Unit on Level A at least four days prior to your procedure. You do not need to book an appointment as this is a walk-in service which is open from 1pm–4pm Monday to Friday. Please be aware that there might be a slight delay depending on the demand.

What can I expect the day of the procedure?

You should have a light early breakfast of toast or a bowl of cereal and a cup of tea before 6:00 am on the morning of your procedure unless another time was specified on your letter. Please take all your normal medications except the medications listed on the appointment letter. After taking your medications please do NOT forget to bring them ALL with you so that nursing staff can record anything that you may be taking.

On the day of your procedure you will arrive at the Cardiac Day Ward (CDW) at the time advised on your letter. A cardiac nurse will be there to greet you and check you in. This includes vital observations, inserting a cannula in to a vein in your arm (in case we need to give you any medication during the procedure) and completion of a questionnaire checklist. The doctor will then discuss the procedure benefits and risks with you, before gaining your consent to proceed.

What does the procedure involve?

The pacemaker implantation is done under local anaesthetic in a sterile X-ray laboratory. The procedure will take approximately 1 hour.

Once inside the laboratory, you will be greeted by a cardiac technician who will attach you to an ECG monitor and a blood pressure cuff. You will then be asked to lie on the bed which is flat and narrow. A cardiac nurse will drape you with a sterile sheet and prepare your skin for the procedure. The pacemaker is usually inserted on the left hand side of your chest, if you're right handed and vice versa if you are left handed. You will be awake throughout the procedure.

Through the use of x-ray imaging, the consultant will pass the pacemaker lead(s) through a vein in to the heart. Once a satisfactory lead(s) position is established, the cardiac technician will test the

function of the lead(s). If the lead(s) are working well, they will then be plugged in to the pacemaker. The pacemaker will then be inserted under the skin. Once the consultant has finished the stitching, you will return to the CDW where you will have observations for at least two hours.

In the CDW a cardiac technician will check your pacemaker one final time. You may then have a chest x-ray performed before you return home.

If you live alone and have no one to stay with you or the procedure is more complicated than expected you may have to stay overnight.

Are there any risks associated with the procedure?

As with any procedure there are risks associated, the most common risks with a pacemaker are bleeding, infection and potential problems with the pacemaker itself. Risks aside the benefits gained are usually far greater and few alternatives are available.

Are there any alternatives to this procedure?

If your heart rate is too slow, or if your heart rhythm cannot be controlled by medication, a pacemaker is the only treatment available.

What can I expect post procedure?

- The next few weeks (4) after the procedure, the cardiac technician will advise you not to lift your arm (on the side of the implant) above shoulder height. It is also important not to push down on your left hand, for example getting out of bed. This minimizes the chance of the leads moving. If the leads move position, this may require another similar procedure to resolve the issue.

You should abstain from certain sports during this time such as Golf or rowing etc.

- The cardiac technician will also give you a pacemaker identification card, which you should carry with you at all times.

- After your pacemaker implantation you will receive an appointment to visit the pacing clinic within 6 weeks of implantation. The appointment will be in the Clinical Measurements Department. Here the pacemaker function and your wound will be assessed.
- Under DVLA rules that you should not drive for one week after a pacemaker implantation but we recommend no driving for one month to enable the pacemaker leads to stabilise. You must inform the DVLA that you have a pacemaker.
- Medication (Please continue with medication as before, any changes will be discussed prior to discharge).
- Please discuss with your consultant if you are intending to fly soon after the procedure and also about when you can return to work.

How can I care for the wound?

- If you are informed that glue was used on your wound, the site must be kept dry for a minimum of 24 hours and then not scrubbed or washed with soap until the glue comes off on its own accord. Do not pick or touch the wound until it is fully healed.
- If you are informed that stitches were used and you have a dressing on the wound, the site must be kept dry for one week and the dressing left on for this time period. The stitches will be dissolvable unless stated otherwise.
- In both cases if you feel more than mild discomfort or are worried about infection then you must seek advice from your GP or the pacing clinic.

Useful information

- Home monitoring is available for different types of pacemakers. It involves a secure transmission of your pacemaker information through your phone line, allowing flexibility for follow up.

Further reading

Arrhythmia Alliance

- 01789 450787
- info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk

Atrial Fibrillation

- www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

- www.bhf.org.uk

Reference sources

- Ellenbogen, K, and Wood, M., 2008. Cardiac Pacing and ICDs. 5th Ed. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd
- Medtronic, Inc. (www.medtronic.co.uk)

Contact details

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Pacemaker Department

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Cardiac Day Ward

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Coronary Care Unit

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4016

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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