

# Living with an implantable cardiac device

Tens of thousands of people have a battery-powered device surgically placed in their chest to help their heart beat normally. Many of them have a pacemaker, which uses low-energy electrical signals to keep the heart from beating too slowly. Others have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD), which provides a high-energy electrical pulse when needed to interrupt a dangerously fast heartbeat. If you're going to receive a pacemaker or ICD, there are some things you need to know.

## The surgery

To implant the device, your surgeon will make a small incision, most likely just below your collarbone, and connect the device's wires to certain parts of your heart. Many patients need only local anesthesia and are able to go home the same day as the procedure or after staying overnight.

Right after surgery, you'll need to avoid moving the arm on the side of the device, even while you sleep. Be sure to call your doctor right away if you have chest pain, shortness of breath, fever, sudden weight gain, or swelling of the hands, arms, legs, ankles, or feet, or if your incision becomes red, warm, or has drainage.

## Living with the device

You can resume your normal activities as soon as your doctor says so, but avoid putting pressure directly over the device, and don't participate in contact sports. Ask your doctor about when it's safe to drive.

Most electrical equipment, including household appliances such as microwave ovens and office and shop equipment, won't affect your device. It's also safe to pass through metal detectors at airports and other security checkpoints. You, will, however, have to avoid things that contain large magnets or strong electromagnetic fields, such as high-voltage electrical transformers, arc welding equipment,

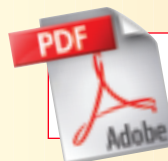
and heavy-duty industrial motors and equipment. You will also need to keep cell phones at least six inches away from your device.

Remember to always carry the ID card your doctor gave you and to tell your healthcare providers—including your dentist—that you have a pacemaker or ICD. Also, be sure to take all medications as prescribed, follow your doctor's instructions about diet and exercise, and keep all scheduled medical appointments.

## Replacing the battery

Depending upon which device you have, the battery will last at least five years. Even though changing the battery requires replacing the pacemaker or ICD, this procedure is usually quicker and simpler than the initial surgery.

**Sources:** **1.** Wood, M. A., & Ellenbogen, K. A. (2002). Cardiology patient pages. Cardiac pacemakers from the patient's perspective. *Circulation*, 105(18), 2136. **2.** American Heart Association. "Managing your pacemaker." 2006. [www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=32](http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=32) (17 Apr. 2006). **3.** Woodruff, J., & Prudente, L. A. (2005). Update on implantable pacemakers. *J Cardiovasc Nurs*, 20(4), 261.



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