

Deactivating your ICD

A patient's guide

There may come a point in your life when you would prefer not to have a shock to correct a life threatening heart rhythm. This may be if your heart condition has deteriorated or you have another medical condition which cannot be cured. This leaflet is designed to help you when considering this option.

When is deactivating an ICD considered?

Deactivation may be considered if receiving shocks is unlikely to prolong your life and may cause distress. This may be the case if you have been diagnosed with a terminal condition and are thought to be reaching the end of your life.

For some people, their heart condition reaches a stage where it is no longer possible to maintain a good quality of life or to prevent rhythm disturbances that cause frequent shocks. It may be that you feel that dying suddenly from a heart rhythm disturbance is preferable to the prospect of a slow deterioration.

Who makes the decision to deactivate the ICD?

Ideally, this would be you, which is why we aim to raise the issue well before a decision is urgently needed. It is important that you are aware of this option early on so you have time to consider how you feel about deactivation and can play an active part in the decision making process. This ensures that people involved in your care know and understand your wishes.

If you have not expressed your wishes and are not able to do so, a discussion will take place between your next of kin and the doctors involved in your care. The decision may then be made to deactivate your ICD.

A consent form is completed and signed by the relevant parties.

How is the ICD deactivated?

The process is carried out by a Cardiac Physiologist and is similar to when you have an ICD check. A programming device is placed over your ICD and the settings are altered on a computer. The ICD can be deactivated so it will no longer deliver a shock but the pacing function is left unchanged.

What happens when it is deactivated?

You will not feel any different. Deactivating the ICD does not cause death nor will it cause any pain or deterioration in your condition.

What if I change my mind?

Once it is deactivated, should you change your mind, it can be reactivated at any time.

Who can I talk to for further advice?

The choice to deactivate your ICD is primarily yours and there are people to advise and support you with your decision. If you would like to discuss this possibility, please talk to the Arrhythmia Specialist Nurses on 01480 364947.

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