

Pacemakers

Follow-up guide
for patients

Introduction

This leaflet has been written to provide information about the follow-up care arrangements for the pacemaker device that was implanted to help correct abnormal heart rhythms.

We hope it answers some of the questions or concerns you may have about living with a pacemaker and follow-up care arrangements. It is not intended to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

After the procedure

There are some things you may need to consider after your operation. Here are a few rules you should follow.

Do...

- Always carry your pacemaker ID card and the Trust's helpline numbers with you
- Keep your mobile phone on the other side of your body at least six inches away from your pacemaker, and use the opposite ear to your pacemaker
- Be careful with anti-theft devices in shops (often hidden near the entrance). Walk through them at a normal pace and don't stop in the middle or too close either side
- Tell your cardiologist, cardiac physiologist or arrhythmia specialist nurse of any worries or anxieties you might have
- Keep your appointments with your cardiologist and physiologists
- Tell your doctor, dentist and other clinicians about your pacemaker as it may affect your treatment
- Ask for help if things are difficult. Our contact details are in this leaflet. Please don't hesitate to get in touch
- Enjoy life

Don't...

- Don't get too close to a strong magnetic field, eg spot or arc welding
- Don't touch the pacemaker site, particularly soon after the procedure. You will be advised about how to look after your wound
- Don't put small magnets near your pacemaker, eg the magnets cats wear to activate cat flaps, magnets to hold scarves in place
- Don't have an MRI scan unless you have specifically been advised it is safe to do so (CT scans are safe for your pacemaker)
- Don't change your heart medications (particularly beta blockers and antiarrhythmic drugs such as amiodarone) or stop your heart medication without checking with your cardiologist, cardiac physiologist or arrhythmia specialist nurse
- Don't take part in any contact sports that could result in a blow to your pacemaker without discussion with your cardiologist, cardiac physiologist or arrhythmia specialist nurse
- Don't be afraid to ask questions

Back at home

Most people adapt fairly quickly to having a pacemaker implanted and are able to lead a relatively normal life after making a few adjustments. However, many people find they have some questions when they get home. Some common ones are listed here.

How can I care for my pacemaker wound?

The dressing over your wound is waterproof so you may shower as usual. You should remove the dressing yourself after four days and leave the wound uncovered. The stitches are under the skin and are dissolvable so there is no need to have them removed.

It is normal to have some bruising and this should resolve within two to three weeks. However, if you have any signs of infection such as increased pain, redness, swelling or discharge around the wound, or if the wound area feels hotter than the surrounding skin or you have a raised temperature, contact the arrhythmia specialist nurses for advice and support.

How much can I move my arm?

It is important to allow time for the device to settle in. We advise that you should not lift the arm nearest your pacemaker above your head or stretch behind your back for the first month. However, do keep your arm mobile to avoid shoulder stiffness by doing normal activities such as washing, dressing and eating.

Once the first month is over, gradually increase your activity and arm movements over the next few weeks.

Can I exercise?

Other medical conditions you have may limit your exercise but the pacemaker will not. It is important to build up your level of exercise over several weeks. Your cardiologist, cardiac physiologist or arrhythmia specialist nurse will be able to advise regarding safe exercise limits.

Activities involving repetitive arm exercise such as swimming, rowing and golf should be avoided for two to three months. It is advisable not to play contact sports as these

may damage the pacemaker. Please discuss specific sports or activities with the arrhythmia specialist nurse as sometimes special protection is possible.

How soon can I drive after implantation?

The regulations regarding driving are complex and subject to change. You will not be able to drive for a period of time after your pacemaker implantation. This could be either one week or one month depending on the reason the pacemaker was implanted.

We recommend you check the current driving restrictions with the DVLA. Your cardiac physiologist will be able to advise you about the rules related to your situation.

If you find a seatbelt uncomfortable, we recommend placing extra padding over the pacemaker site. As a passenger, try sitting behind the driver, so that the seatbelt crosses the other shoulder.

Can I go on holiday or travel abroad?

The pacemaker will not restrict you with any form of travel, although your cardiologist may advise against this if your general condition is likely to cause problems.

Take details of your device, and sufficient supplies of your medication. It is very important that your medication is carried in your hand luggage in case of delays or problems during your travel.

It is essential that your holiday insurance company is aware that you have a pacemaker.

Your clinic or pacemaker manufacturer will be able to give you a list of pacemaker clinics in any country you are visiting. Please contact the arrhythmia specialist nurse if you have any queries or concerns about spending time abroad.

If you are due a follow-up soon we would advise you arrange to have this before you go away (please contact us if you need to change an appointment).

Can I go through security gates and metal detectors?

Anti-theft systems in shops and airports can interfere with pacemakers, but they are safe provided that you go through at normal pace.

Sometimes these systems may set off the alarm, therefore, please advise airport security staff that you have a pacemaker before going through the archway detector. We recommend that you carry your ID card as you go through security to highlight the reason for the alarm.

Can I use a microwave oven, computer and other domestic electrical equipment?

Most household appliances are not a problem as long as they are well maintained and regularly serviced. Although it cannot be categorically ruled out, any CE marked domestic electrical appliances are unlikely to affect an pacemaker. Computers should not affect your pacemaker.

As a rule, do not place anything containing strong magnets over the pacemaker site.

Are there any restrictions regarding special environments?

Modern pacemakers are rarely affected by common electrical environments. However if you work closely with high levels of electro-magnetic radiation it is important to discuss this with one of the cardiac physiologists.

Visiting hospital

If you are spending time in hospital, let hospital staff know that you have an pacemaker. Usually this will not affect your treatment, but in some instances we may need to adjust the settings of your pacemaker before or after your procedure.

You must not have an MRI scan (body imaging scan) unless you have an pacemaker especially designed to be compatible (please contact us if you are not sure about your device). This is because the MRI scanner uses strong magnets; other scans are safe.

Pacemakers may not be compatible with therapeutic radiation dosing, TENS machines and lithotripsy.

Please ask your cardiac physiologist for advice before having these treatments.

How long will the battery in my pacemaker last?

This depends on use and the type of pacemaker you have, but your battery is likely to last several years. Battery life is monitored at every pacemaker check. When the time comes that we need to consider changing the pacemaker, you will need to have another procedure to replace it.

Will I know when my pacemaker is working?

Your pacemaker will be set to send electrical impulses to stimulate your heart to beat if your heart's own natural pacemaker does not send a normal impulse.

You are unlikely to be aware of your pacemaker working but if you have had a very slow heart rate before it was implanted, you may be aware your heart is beating faster.

Some types of pacemaker are designed to synchronise the pumping chambers of the heart in people suffering from

heart failure, this is called Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy (CRT).

CRT pacemakers completely take over the stimulation of the heart, so every impulse comes from the pacemaker. If you have a CRT pacemaker, although you may not be aware of the pacemaker, you may see a change in your heart failure symptoms.

What are my follow-up care arrangements?

It is important that you attend regular check-ups at a pacemaker clinic. These may be at three to twelve month intervals depending on the type and age of your pacemaker. Some devices can be monitored remotely. If this applies to your device, the procedure will be explained by a cardiac physiologist at the pacemaker clinic.

Routine follow-ups are specifically to check your pacemaker and do not replace your normal medical management in any way.

What is the pacemaker registration card or form?

This is identification ID for your device: it has the make, model and serial number of your device as well as details of the original settings. This will be sent to you following your implantation; please carry it with you at all times and show it to any doctor or dentist who may treat you.

Always bring your pacemaker ID to your appointments.

How can I book and change my follow-up appointments?

It is important that you have a pacemaker check at least once a year. If you have not had a pacemaker follow-up within the past year, please contact us to book an appointment.

Please inform us if you are unable to attend your appointment so that your slot can be made available to another patient and your appointment can be rescheduled.

If you change your contact details please let us know so that we can keep our records up to date.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about my care at Papworth Hospital?

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is an independent office based at Papworth Hospital who offer a confidential service to help you sort out any concerns you may have about the care Papworth Hospital provides.

PALS Department
Papworth Hospital NHS
Foundation Trust
Papworth Everard
Cambridge CB23 3RE
Telephone: 01480 364896

Who can I contact for advice and support?

For advice and support

The Arrhythmia Specialist Nurses
Papworth Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Papworth Everard, Cambridge, CB23 3RE

Telephone: 01480 364947

Email: Email: phn-tr.arrhythmia-nurses@nhs.net

My pacemaker details:

For appointment bookings

Pacing and ICD Department Office
Papworth Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Papworth Everard, Cambridge, CB23 3RE

Telephone: 01480 364371

My appointment details:

Are there other organisations that offer advice about pacemakers?

Arrhythmia Alliance - the heart rhythm charity

PO Box 3697
Stratford-Upon-Avon
Warwickshire
CV37 8YL

24hr helpline 01789 450787
Email: info@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk
Website: www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

BHF
Greater London House
180 Hampstead Road
London NW1 7AW

Heart helpline 0300 330 3311
Email: supporterservices@bhf.org.uk
Website: www.bhf.org.uk

DVLA

Drivers Medical Group
DVLA
Swansea
SA99 1TU

Telephone: 0870 2400010
Email: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.dft.gov.uk/dvla

Further information about health issues that affect driving

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/driverhealth

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Papworth Everard, Cambridge, CB23 3RE

Tel: 01480 830541

Fax: 01480 831315

www.papworthhospital.nhs.uk

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