



Biventricular pacemaker insertion

Patient discharge instructions

A pacemaker is a device that prevents your heart from beating too slowly. It has two main parts. One is called the “pulse generator.” This is a small metal compartment that contains a battery and electronic circuits. The pacemaker also has electrical leads, or wires, that carry electrical signals between the pulse generator and your heart.

This sheet contains important instructions regarding your pacemaker. If you have any questions, please be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.

How should I take care of my incision?

- You should keep the incision dry. You may take a tub bath or sponge bath as long as the incision does not get wet. Please do not shower until you are seen in the device clinic for your appointment. This is about one week after your procedure. Please **do not** try to put bandages or saran wrap over the incision in order to shower. If any moisture gets into the wound, it can lead to serious infection.
- You may take the dressing off when you get home if you wish. If you are more comfortable with the incision covered, use a dry sterile gauze over the area.
- Do not apply lotion or powder to the incision.

To reach a nurse or doctor about your pacemaker

Device clinic nurse: 617-667-9383 (Weekdays)
The clinic is located on the BIDMC east campus, on the 7th floor of the Shapiro Building.

EP doctor on call: 617-667-4700, page the EP doctor (evenings, nights, weekends, and holidays)

If you have been told you have “heart failure”

Heart failure is a condition that reduces the heart’s ability to pump blood. Because of heart failure, the heart cannot pump enough blood to supply the body’s need for oxygen. As a result, fluid may build up and you may experience shortness of breath, swelling of the feet and legs, and weight gain.

As a patient with heart failure, you should:

- Weigh yourself every morning
- Follow a low salt diet (2 grams of sodium or less per day)
- Take medication as prescribed

You should call your doctor or nurse if you notice:

- Weight gain of more than three pounds
- Worsening shortness of breath
- Swelling of the feet or legs

information

- You might have slight itching at the incision. Try not to scratch the incision or rub it.
- You may see small paper strips across the incision. Please allow these to fall off on their own. (This may take several weeks.)
- Let someone in the device clinic (617-667-9383) know right away if there are signs of infection to the area, including:
 - redness
 - swelling
 - drainage
 - fever – temperature of 101 or more
 - pain that is getting worse instead of better
 - any opening in the skin at the site of device
- If needed, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) every six hours as needed for discomfort. (Never take more than 4 grams, or 4,000 milligrams, of Tylenol in 24 hours.) If your discomfort is severe or is not relieved by Tylenol please call us.

May I go back to my usual activities?

Please follow these guidelines regarding activity. Ask questions about any other activities you aren't sure about.

- You may be asked not to **drive** for a certain amount of time during your recovery. This is different for everyone. Please ask your doctor when you may drive.
- During the first six-eight weeks, you will need to watch how you use the arm on the side where your pacemaker was inserted. Do not raise the arm above the height of your shoulder. You may not swim or play tennis or golf. You may wash your face, brush your teeth, shave, and comb your hair as usual. This is a good time to ask for help with things like raking leaves, cleaning, painting, ironing, vacuuming, or walking a dog.
- For six weeks, don't lift or carry anything weighing more than five pounds. You may receive additional instructions regarding not pulling or pushing things with the arm on the side of your pacemaker for a period of time. Please ask if this applies to you.

What medicines should I take?

- Before you leave the hospital, you will be given a list of all the medicines you should take once you are at home. Please be sure to ask any questions you have about medications. **If something you normally take is not on the list, please ask whether you should continue taking it. This includes prescription**

medicines, nonprescription medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.

- You may be given a prescription for antibiotics to take for a short time when you get home.
- If you are on warfarin (Coumadin), you are likely to need a blood test within five days of discharge. Please ask if you do not know when your next blood test should be.

Use of electronic and other equipment

- Because of your pacemaker, **you should never have an MRI** (magnetic resonance imaging) to any part of your body. MRI is a special test that uses a magnet to look inside the body. Exposure to the MRI magnet can ruin the pacemaker, causing it to malfunction.
- Arc welding is also not allowed.
- You may use a microwave oven. You may use cell phones, remote controls, and other electronic devices, but these must be held at least one foot from the pacemaker.
- Please do not walk through security gates at airports. Show your ID card to the security personnel and go around the gate. Although unlikely, the gate could cause your device to malfunction.
- Do not allow security personnel to put a scanning wand within one foot of your device. It is ok for them to use the wand on your body, but it needs to stay one foot away from where your pacemaker is implanted.

Other important information

- You will receive a pacemaker identification card in the coming weeks. You should carry it with you at all times.
- You should also carry a list of your medications, a brief summary of your medical history, a list of any allergies, and your doctors' phone numbers.
- Be sure to always tell any doctor, dentist, or other health care provider who treats you that you have a pacemaker.
- You may wish to purchase a medical identification bracelet or necklace that informs anyone caring for you that you have a pacemaker.

How can I reach a nurse or doctor if I have a question?

On weekdays, a nurse at the pacemaker/device clinic is available to answer your questions. The phone number appears on the front of this sheet. You may also call your own EP (electrophysiology) doctor. On evenings, nights, weekends, and holidays, you may call the EP physician on call.

Follow-up appointments

Prior to your discharge home, you will be given information about your follow-up appointments. Be sure to ask any questions you may have about your appointments.

Call for help if:

As noted above, call for help if you have:

- redness, swelling, drainage, or any opening at the area of your incision
- temperature of 101 or more
- pain from the incision that is getting worse instead of better
- swelling of the feet or legs
- weight gain of more than three pounds
- worsening shortness of breath
- a return of symptoms you had before your pacemaker insertion or any other symptom that concerns you

Note: You underwent a procedure performed under fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance. Procedures involving lengthy exposures to x-rays may cause damage to the skin and/or hair. These adverse effects may be increased if one has had previous (especially recent) radiation exposure to the same skin area. Radiation injury to the skin can take many forms, including an area of redness, blistering, hair loss, or ulceration. These effects may appear after a few weeks or even after several months. If any of these occur on the side and back of torso (or elsewhere), please contact the interventional cardiology section at 617-632-7455 to arrange further evaluation.

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