Home Care after Permanent Pacemaker Placement

This handout will help you learn how to care for yourself after having a permanent pacemaker placed. A nurse will review this with you before you go home.

What is a pacemaker?
A pacemaker is a small electronic device placed just under your skin, above the layer of muscle. It helps pace your heart in order to keep a healthy heart rate. It senses if the heart is beating too slowly or pausing too long between heart beats. If it senses a slow rate or a pause that is too long, it will send electrical pulses to keep your heart rate steady.

Details about Your Pacemaker
Date your pacemaker was placed: ________
by Dr. __________________.

Rate of your pacemaker: _______________
It may change with your activity level or your body’s needs.

The company that made your pacemaker is ___________________________________.

Follow-up Visits
You will need a clinic visit 2-3 weeks after your pacemaker is placed. The site will be checked to see how you are healing. The pacemaker will also be checked. This is also called interrogation.

Your follow-up visit is scheduled:
Location_________________________________
Date______________________________
Time______________________________

Your pacemaker will be checked about every 3 months. In some cases, we may be able to alternate clinic visits with remote checks from your home. We will talk about this at your first clinic visit.

Incision care
If DermaBond “Clear Glue” was applied to your incision, you may shower the day after your procedure.

If a dressing was applied over your incision:
• Leave the current bandage on until__________________________.
• Site should be kept clean, and dry (no showering) for _____days following the procedure. When you do shower, let the soap and water run down the incision.
• Do not scrub or rub the site.
• Gently clean the site with soap and water. Pat dry and leave open to air.
• The steri strips (the thin pieces of tape over the incision) hold the skin together as it heals. These should be left in place until they fall off on their own or the nurse will remove them at your first visit.

Do not use any lotions or ointments over the incisions. As the site heals, you may feel itching, this is normal. Do not scratch or rub the site.

Look at the site daily for any signs of infection:
• Redness
• Swelling
• Drainage
• Warmth over the site
• Increased tenderness
• Fever (101 ° F or greater)

If you notice any of the above, you will need to call the device clinic the same day at (608) 263-1530.
Pain
If you have pain at the site, you may take any mild pain reliever that has worked for you in the past such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®).

Activity Restrictions
For 2 months, on the side your device was put in:
- Do not raise your elbow above your shoulder or any other movements that cause you to stretch.
- Do not lift more than 5 pounds of weight on your surgical side.
- Do not reach above your head or out to the side.
No swimming, overhead motions, or golfing for 3 months.

Avoid dental work for 1 month.

Wear a sling on the arm of pacemaker placement at night for the first week.

No driving for 1 week after the procedure (or longer if recommended by your health care provider).

Pacemaker ID Card
You have been given a temporary ID card. Carry your card with you at all times. The device company will mail your permanent card to you in about 2 months. Be sure to let all people know you see for your health and dental care that you have a permanent pacemaker. This includes all doctors, nurses, dentists, and chiropractors or any other person you see for your health care.

Electrical Hazards
There are certain electrical hazards to be aware of. See below for a list of cautions, things to avoid, and devices that are okay to be around. This is just a partial list. For more information, call your device company. The phone number is on the back of your ID card.

Avoid:
- Working under the hood of a running car.
- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).
- Electrocautery-in the operating room or in the dentist’s office.
- Arc welding.

Cautions:
- Therapeutic radiation
- Cell phones: These should be 6 inches from your pacemaker. Place the phone on the ear opposite of your pacemaker or use a headset.
- Theft detection devices: These are often around the entrances of stores. Walk through them as you normally would. Do not linger near these.
- Airport security: Tell security staff you have a device. Show them the Medical Device ID card.
- Magnets: Magnetic snap closures (in jackets), magnetic name badges, and any electronic equipment with a magnetic strip. Anything with a magnet should be 6-8 inches from your device.

Okay to be around
- Microwave ovens
- Hair dryers
- Electric blankets and heating pads
- Computers
- Radios, TVs, and stereos

When to Call
Call the doctor or pacemaker nurse the same day if:
- You feel dizzy, lightheaded, or the symptoms come back that you had before your pacemaker was placed.
- Your heart rate drops below the programmed rate, call the Pacemaker Clinic. If you cannot get in touch with the clinic, call your local doctor.
- You have any signs of infection.
Who to Call
UW Health Heart and Vascular Clinic

- Monday to Friday: (608) 263-1530
- After hours, nights, weekend, and holidays this number is answered by the messaged center. Ask for the cardiology fellow on call. Give the operator your full name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.
- If you live out of the area, please call 1-800-323-8942.