

*If you have  
any questions  
or concerns,  
please ask  
your clinician.*

## Understanding Your Pacemaker

You and your physician have decided that you need a permanent pacemaker. It is important for you to understand:

- What a pacemaker is
- How it can help you
- What follow-up care you need

### How it works

A pacemaker is a device that can protect you against certain types of abnormal heart rhythms by constantly monitoring your heart. It can detect a slow heart rhythm (bradycardia) and produce electrical impulses to keep your heart rate from going too slow.

The physician usually puts the pacemaker in your upper chest area just below your collarbone. It is about the size of 2 stacked silver dollars. Most weigh 1 ounce or less. The pacemaker is made up of a pulse generator (battery and electrical circuit) and 1 to 3 wires (pacing leads). The physician threads the pacing leads through a vein leading to your heart. The leads carry information about your heart rhythm back to the generator. They are also used to transmit needed electrical impulses to your heart. After the physician confirms the correct placement, they will connect the leads to the generator. The physician will program the pacemaker to best fit your specific needs.

### Pacemaker placement

A staff member from the Electrophysiology Lab will call you with day-of surgery instructions 1 business day before your procedure.

To prepare for the procedure:

- Do not eat or drink after midnight before the procedure.
- Remove eyeglasses, contact lenses and all jewelry.

You will have the pacemaker procedure in the Electrophysiology Lab. The care team will give you medication to make you comfortable during procedure. You then will go to a cardiac monitoring unit to recover. Your care team will check the pacemaker the next day to see that it is working properly.

Before you are discharged, you will have a chest X-ray.

Please call the Northwestern Medicine Bluhm Heart Hospital Device Clinic at 312.695.1926 (TTY: 711) to make a wound check visit for 7 to 14 days after your surgery.

## After your surgery

At home, you will need time to recover from the surgery. It is important for you to listen to your body and rest when you feel tired. Eat a proper diet. Follow up with your physician for scheduled visit.

### ***Incision care***

- Do not shower or get the wound bandage wet until after the wound check visit 7 to 14 days after surgery.
- When your physician tells you it is OK, you can shower and get the incision wet. Let the water, soap and shampoo trickle over the incision. Do not scrub the incision or the area around it. Pat the incision dry.
- Do not take a bath or submerge the incision in water for 6 weeks.
- Do not put any lotions, creams or gel over the incision.
- Do not raise your arm on the same side of your device over your shoulder for the next 6 weeks. You may use this arm for everyday activities.
- The tape strips (Steri-Strips™) over the incision can come off 1 week after your wound check visit.
- Protect your incision from the sun to avoid sunburn and decrease scarring.

### ***Activity guidelines***

- Do not drive until your care team gives you instructions about driving at your 1-week follow-up visit. Driving may be allowed after 1 to 6 weeks.
- Do not raise your arm on the same side of your device over your shoulder for the next 6 weeks. You may use your affected arm for everyday activities. A sling is not recommended during your recovery time.
- We encourage exercise. It is important to start slowly and then progress as you are able. Rest when you are tired. There are many benefits to a regular exercise program. Talk with your physician to see what options are best for you.
- Do not use exercise machines that require you to move your arms for the next 6 weeks.
- Do not do exercises or activities that could result in blunt blows to the pacemaker site, such as contact sports.
- Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds (such as groceries, laundry and children) until 6 weeks after surgery.
- You should not do activities involving stretching and/or reaching movements with your affected arm (such as golf, tennis and yoga) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Do not go swimming or use whirlpools for 6 weeks and the incision is completely healed to decrease the risk of infection.
- Do not have dental work for 3 months after the surgery.

## When to call your physician

Call your physician if you have any of these signs of infection:

- A temperature more than 100 degrees F
- Redness, swelling or tenderness at the incision site
- Drainage from the incision site

***Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if you have any of these symptoms:***

- Chest pain
- Palpitations
- Fainting or passing out

If you go to an emergency department, have them call the Device Clinic at 312.695.1926 (TTY: 711) for information about your pacemaker.

## Follow-up care and visit

After your pacemaker procedure, you will have follow-up visit in the Device Clinic to check that it is working properly. The physician may reprogram your pacemaker to fit your needs. Part of your follow-up involves checking the battery life of the pacemaker.

If you have a MyNM account, you can have your wound checked remotely by sending a photo of the incision to the device clinic care team instead of coming to the clinic. The clinic staff will contact you if a remote MyNM wound check is right for you.

### **Visit**

It is very important that you keep your follow-up visit. The Device Clinic is located at:  
675 North Saint Clair Street  
19th Floor, Suite 100  
Chicago, Illinois  
312.695.1926 (TTY: 711)

### **7 to 14 days after your surgery**

You will need to come back to the Device Clinic for a wound check or send a photo through MyNM if appropriate.

Your wound check visit is on: \_\_\_\_\_

After this visit, you will have another visit in **3 months**. You will then start remote home monitoring. You will send the physician a remote data transmission every 3 months for the next year. You will have an in-person visit in the Device Clinic every 1 to 2 years. At that time, you will also see the electrophysiology nurse practitioner.

## Living with your pacemaker

### ***Magnets and electrical devices***

Keep your device at least 6 inches away from all magnetic things. Normal use of properly operating household appliances should not damage your pacemaker. Microwave ovens and cellphones are safe to use. However, do not carry your cellphone in your shirt pocket over your device. When talking on your cellphone, hold it to your ear on the opposite side of your device.

Using electric arc welders or working on automobile ignition systems also will not damage your pacemaker. However, they can interfere with your pacemaker function. If you are using electrical equipment or working around running motors and you become lightheaded or feel palpitations, turn the equipment off or walk away from it. Normal pacemaker function should resume.

You may have X-ray examinations and computed tomography (CT) scans. If you have an order for a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, please contact the Device Clinic for instructions. Dental equipment is safe with a few exceptions. Tell your dentist about your pacemaker before you have any dental procedures.

Metal detectors and hand-held wands that are used at airports or federal buildings are magnets. They will not harm your pacemaker. Let security know you have an implanted device. It is OK to use the X-ray scanners at the airport, or you can request a pat-down screening. The pacemaker will not set off the metal detector. Carry your pacemaker ID card with you.

### ***Your device***

You have this implanted device: \_\_\_\_\_

Device company phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

You should receive a temporary ID card from the device company. You will receive a permanent ID card in the mail 3 to 4 weeks after your procedure. ***Carry this ID card with you at all times.***

If you have any specific questions about your device, please contact the device company.

It is important to notify all your physicians that you have a pacemaker.

If you have any questions or concerns about your pacemaker or specific tests you need, call the Device Clinic nurse at 312.695.1926 (TTY 711).