



Patient & Family Guide

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Living With Your Pacemaker

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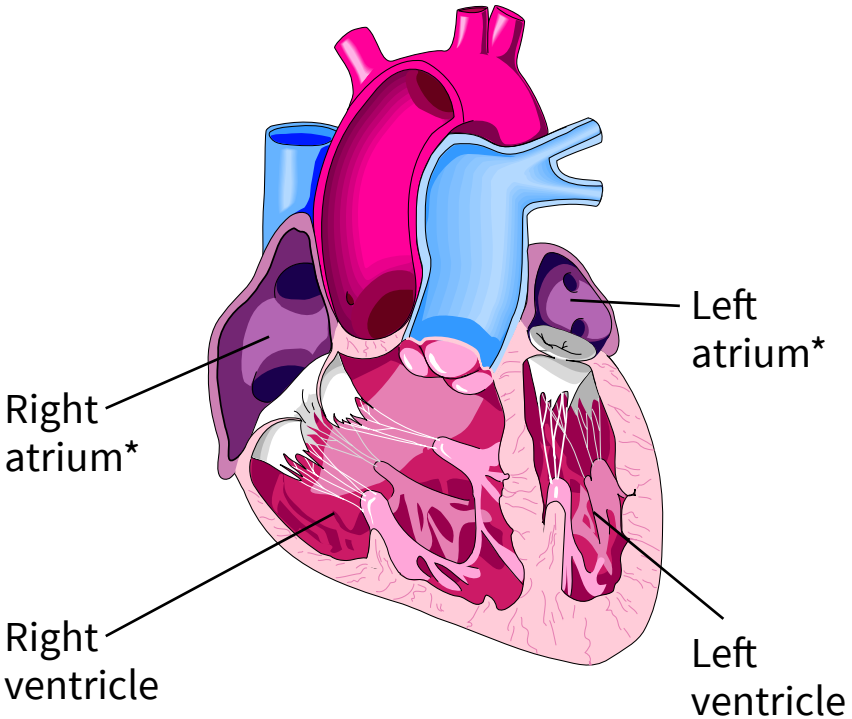


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Living With Your Pacemaker

How does my heart beat?

The heart has an electrical system that controls how fast it beats. A normal heartbeat starts from the top part of your heart (atria*) and spreads to the bottom part of your heart (ventricles). This lets the heart fill with blood. The blood is then sent out to your body.



*Atria is the plural form of the word atrium.

What happens if I have problems with my heartbeat?

Different problems with your heartbeat may cause different symptoms. This will depend on how your circulation (movement of blood through your body) is affected.

The most common symptoms are:

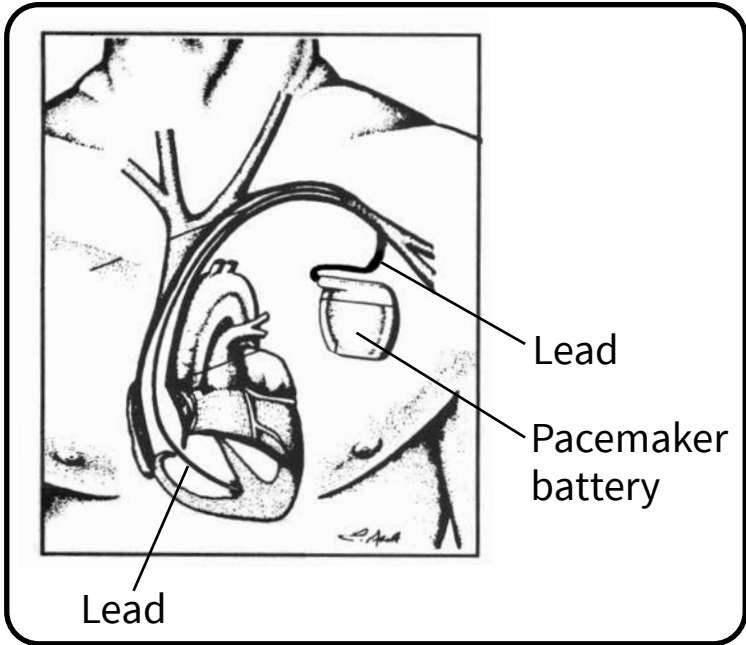
- › Fainting
- › Feeling lightheaded
- › Dizziness

Other symptoms include:

- › Feeling tired
- › Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- › Chest pain
- › Swelling in your feet or ankles

What is a pacemaker?

- A pacemaker is used to prevent your heart from beating too slowly. It can also be used to make your heart beat faster to suit your activity. You will need to have surgery to have the device placed in your body.



How is the procedure done?

- A thin, insulated wire called a lead (“leed”) is placed in a vein and passed into your heart. The lead is attached to the pacemaker generator (power source). **Your pacemaker will only send impulses when needed.**
- There is a battery sealed inside the device. **The battery will usually last for about 7 to 10 years.** This will depend on how often it is used.
- **When the battery runs low, you will need a new pacemaker.** The lead may not need to be changed when the device is replaced.

After your procedure

- You will have an electrocardiogram (ECG) and a chest X-ray.
- A nurse will check your bandage.
- You will be able to eat and drink as usual.
- You may have swelling and tenderness around the incision (cut) for a few days. Ask for pain medication, if needed.

Care after sedation

- Sedation is medication given through an intravenous (IV) tube inserted (put in) into a vein in your arm using a needle. This medication will help you feel comfortable and relaxed during the procedure.
- You may not remember parts of your procedure because of this medication.
- After you receive sedation, you must follow these instructions:
 - › **A responsible adult should drive you home and stay with you overnight.**

For 24 hours (1 day) after your procedure:

- **Do not** drive a car or bicycle. The health care team will tell you how long to wait before driving a car after your procedure. It may be longer than 24 hours.
- **Do not** operate machinery.
- **Do not** drink alcohol.
- **Do not** make any important decisions (like signing a contract, making a big purchase, or agreeing to an important commitment).

For 7 days after a new lead is placed:

- **Do not** drive.

Follow-up

- Plans will be made for you to visit the Pacemaker Clinic for follow-up.
- In the Clinic, a special machine called a programmer will check your pacemaker. This does not hurt. A programming head, which looks like a large bar of soap, will be placed on your chest. This is attached to a computer so we can see how your pacemaker is working.
- Your pacemaker will be checked at least once a year. This will be done in the Clinic or through a home monitoring device.

At home

Care of your incision

- Take the first dressing off 2 to 4 days after your procedure. If you were given a new dressing, take off the first dressing, then put the new dressing on. Leave the new dressing on until you are seen for follow-up 5 to 7 days after your procedure.
- If you have Steri-Strips™ (strong pieces of tape) under the dressing, leave them in place on your skin. They will fall off in 7 to 10 days.
- **Do not** shower until the incision is well healed.
- You may have discomfort at the incision site. An over-the-counter pain medication like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may help. If you have questions about what pain medication is right for you, ask your pharmacist.

We recommend that you follow up with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) 5 to 7 days after your procedure. If you have questions after your procedure, please call your primary health care provider.

Check your incision every day for signs of infection until it is healed. Call your primary health care provider if you have any of these symptoms of infection:

- › Swelling at the insertion site that gets bigger
- › Redness or warmth at the insertion site
- › Severe (very bad) pain
- › More pain that happens suddenly
- › Fever (temperature above 38° C/100.4° F)
- › Chills
- › Yellow drainage or fluid from the insertion site

If you cannot reach your primary health provider, call 811 to talk to a registered nurse 24/7.

If it is an emergency, go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 911 right away.

Electrical equipment

- It is safe to use household appliances, including microwaves.
- Keep all electrical appliances and power tools properly grounded and in good repair. This includes gardening tools, and workshop and office equipment.
- Tell your other health care providers, including your dentist, that you have a pacemaker.
- **Do not lean over a running engine.** Some equipment or large motors may interfere with the way the device works. This may make you feel dizzy or faint. The device will work normally when you move away from the equipment.
- You may use a smartphone if you:
 - › keep it at least 6 inches away from your pacemaker.
 - › **do not** carry it in a pocket over your pacemaker.
- Walk normally through theft detectors at store entrances and airport screening detectors. Your device may set off the alarm, but it will keep working normally. Show your identity (ID) card for your device and **ask for a pat down search. Ask that they do not use a hand-held sensor.**

ID card and MedicAlert®

- You will be given a temporary ID card before you leave the hospital. It will list your type of pacemaker and when you got it.
- Within a couple of months, the company that made the pacemaker will mail you a permanent ID card. This information will help if you have to see a doctor who does not know you.
- Ask for a MedicAlert® bracelet application before you leave the hospital.
Wear a MedicAlert® bracelet at all times.



Activities

For the next 6 weeks:

- **Do not** make any sudden, jerky movements that cause your arm on the same side as your pacemaker to pull away from your body (like when a leash pulls on your arm while walking a dog).
- **Do not** apply direct pressure over your pacemaker.
- **Do not** press on the skin over your pacemaker.
- **Do not** reach your arm on the same side as your pacemaker over your head.
- **Do not** lift anything heavier than 5 pounds.

Call 911 if you have any of the following symptoms:

- › Feeling faint
- › Dizziness
- › Heart fluttering
- › Heart racing

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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