



Physician Approved,
Patient Recommended*

WebMD GUIDE

RECOVERY AND LIFE AFTER HEART FAILURE DEVICE THERAPY

Essential Information for Individuals
and Families

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* This educational material was written by WebMD writers and approved by WebMD physicians. WebMD members who have had implant surgery also reviewed and recommend this material.

DAILY LIFE

YOUR CARE

EXPECTATIONS

MY NOTES

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*Yours in health,
The WebMD Guides Staff*

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This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this booklet.

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Life With an Implantable Device

If you've just had surgery, you probably feel sore and maybe a little anxious. Whether you have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD), a cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) pacemaker, or standard pacemaker, you're not going to feel great right away. You may feel vulnerable. You may worry about the future.

But you've just made a big step forward. Your implantable device can allow you a healthier, happier, and possibly longer life.

For many people, an ICD or pacemaker is the best treatment available. No matter where you go, it's with you. A standard or CRT pacemaker will keep your heart beating steadily day-in and day-out. An ICD can save your life in emergencies. It's like having a doctor at your side 24 hours a day.

Pretty soon, you'll probably be able to do everything you could before surgery. You may be able to do a lot more. Combined with regular check-ups, a healthy lifestyle, and possibly medicine, your pacemaker or ICD will let you work, play, exercise, and travel with confidence.

So congratulations. You've taken a big step toward a healthier life.



Recovery from Surgery

After surgery to implant an ICD or pacemaker, you will feel some tenderness around the incision. You may also need to stay in the hospital for a night or two. Your doctor will need to monitor you to make sure that the device is working properly.

But over the next few weeks, you may be surprised at how quickly you feel better. If you have a CRT pacemaker or CRT ICD, your heart failure symptoms may start to bother you less. Try to make note of how you feel now. What does it feel like to walk up a flight of stairs, for instance? Then, a few weeks from now or a few months from now, see how your symptoms feel. You may notice a difference.

If you've had a standard pacemaker or ICD put in, remember that it won't help your day-to-day heart

failure symptoms. That's not what it's designed to do. But it is made to step in and possibly save your life during emergencies.

Get a loved one or friend to help you ask your doctor important questions.

Before you leave the hospital, ask your doctor all of your questions. Here are some key points to address:

- Make sure you know when your next checkup is.
- Know when to get help. Ask your doctor what you should do if you ever experience symptoms, like dizziness or a rapid pulse. If you have an ICD, make sure you understand what to do if you get a shock. It's also important that your family members know what to do in an emergency. If you ever have cardiac arrest and lose consciousness, they need to call 911 right away.
- Because it's easy to get confused when you're in the hospital, get a loved one to help you ask your doctor important questions. Make sure your loved one or friend also understands what you need to do to take care of yourself.

Once you're back home, you should:

- Take care of the incision site. Follow your doctor's instructions. Your doctor may ask you to change your bandages each day. You may need to keep the incision site dry for a while. That may mean no showers for a few days at least.

- Watch out for signs of infection. If the area where you had your device implanted gets red, painful, or swollen, or if you get a fever, call your doctor.
- Keep your hands off. You may find it hard to resist touching the incision. But poking and prodding the area won't help. Leave it alone.
- Tell your doctor if you're in pain. Some discomfort is normal. But if you're in real pain, your doctor may be able to adjust your medication dosage to give you some relief.
- Take it easy for a while. You need to give your body some time to heal before you can get back to all of your normal activities. You may need about two to four weeks of recovery time, depending on the type of surgery.

Your doctor may tell you not to raise your arm above your head or lift heavy objects for about eight weeks. This lowers the risk that a sudden jolt could pull the leads out of place. (The leads are the wires that connect the device to your heart.) The risk of the lead dislodging goes down with time, so you won't be limited for long. Talk with your doctor about what activities you can do during your recovery time.

Once your doctor gives you the OK, you can return to all of your usual habits, like exercise. That includes sexual activity, too.

- Give yourself time to adjust. You may find it strange to have an implantable device at first. It may feel uncomfortable. You may notice a bump under the skin where the device is located. But over time, most people find that their device becomes just another part of their body. Soon, you may forget it's there.



Day-to-Day Concerns

Having a pacemaker or an ICD will allow you to do more, not less. But there are still some precautions you'll need to take. Right now, you may be a little unsure about what you can and can't do.

To help you out, here are some common questions asked by people with new implantable devices.

- **Why do I need to carry an identification card?** You must always carry information about your device with you. The company that makes your pacemaker or ICD will provide you with an identification card. You must have this with you in case of an emergency. For instance, if you were in an accident, it's important that a doctor could quickly find out what heart condition and what type of implantable device you have. Some medical tests may not be safe for people with implantable devices. A doctor might also

need to know the device model so that he or she could call the manufacturer to get more information about it. In addition, you can show your identification card to any security personnel at airports in case a metal detector reacts to your device. You may also want to get jewelry—like a bracelet—that indicates your condition and the device you have.

- **Will I still need medication?** Most people with an ICD or pacemaker still need to take medication for heart failure. However, your doctor may change your dosage after you get an implantable device. Make sure you know how much to take and when to take it. If you tend to forget to take your medicine, try using reminders or get a weekly pillbox. Taking your medication is key to staying healthy.
- **Will I be able to drive again?** If you just have a pacemaker, driving should be no problem once you've recovered. It can be a little more complicated if you have an ICD.

Many doctors recommend that if you've had an ICD implanted, you should wait for about six months before driving. Some states have laws that prohibit you from driving for a while. It's the underlying condition that's the problem, not the ICD. If your heart starts to beat dangerously fast, you could faint. Your ICD may not act quickly enough to prevent it. So if you're prone to fainting, you should probably avoid any activity that could be dangerous if you lost consciousness—such as driving, piloting, and rock climbing, for instance.

If you've had a shock from your ICD, you may need to wait for six or more months afterward before you

can drive again. Laws differ from state to state, so talk with your doctor.

- **Can I exercise like I used to?** You should be able to exercise at least as much as you did before surgery, if not more. But always get your doctor's OK before starting to exercise again. It is possible to damage your implantable device or the leads attached to it, so don't participate in full-contact sports, like wrestling or football. With your doctor's consent, just about any other kind of exercise should be fine.
- **What about sex?** Many people with implantable devices worry that sexual activity might be a risk. But after you recover from surgery and your doctor says physical activity is OK, sex is safe for people with pacemakers or ICDs.
- **Will my ICD give me a shock during normal physical activity?** This can happen, but it's unlikely. ICDs are designed to only give a shock when your heart begins to beat dangerously fast. Normal physical activity shouldn't trigger it. If this does happen, stop exercising and call your doctor. It may be possible to adjust some of the settings on the device to prevent it from happening again.
- **Will a shock from my ICD affect others?** No. People with ICDs are often concerned that a shock from their device could harm people who might be touching them at the time. That's not the case.
- **Do I need to do anything to make sure that my implantable device is working?** Besides going to your regular appointments and following your doctor's instructions, you probably don't need to do anything else. If you have a standard or CRT pacemaker, your

doctor may want you to learn to take your pulse. That way, you can make sure that your heart is beating at the right speed and that your pacemaker is working correctly. Before you leave the hospital, ask your doctor about the normal range for your pulse.



Risk of Electrical Interference

In the past, common types of electrical interference could stop pacemakers from working correctly. That's not the case anymore. These days, implantable devices are more advanced and well insulated. Most household electric devices don't pose any risk. But anyone with an implantable device needs to take a few precautions.

Devices or procedures that pose little or no risk:

- kitchen appliances, including microwave oven
- televisions
- VCRs or DVD players
- radios
- stereos

- remote controls
- computers
- electric blankets
- major appliances, like refrigerators, washers and dryers, and stoves
- most office equipment, like copiers or fax machines
- most power tools
- electric shavers
- X-rays or CT scans

Devices that pose a potential risk:

- **Cell phones.** Anyone with a pacemaker or ICD can still use a cell phone. But in general, keep a cell phone that's turned on about 6 inches away from your device. Hold the phone against the ear that's on the opposite side of your device. Also, don't carry your cell phone in a shirt pocket right next to your pacemaker or ICD.
- **Electronic security systems** such as the ones in stores are generally safe. You shouldn't have any problems if you just walk on through. But the systems in airports may interfere with your implantable device. You should also avoid the "wands" that are sometimes used in security checks. Just tell the security personnel about your ICD or pacemaker, show your identification card, and ask to be searched by hand.

Devices or activities that pose a risk:

- **Certain medical tests, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) tests,** can affect how your implantable device works. You may need to have your device turned off for the test.
- **Certain medical procedures, such as radiation therapy for tumors,** can damage some implantable devices. Because other tests or procedures can also cause problems, always tell any doctor or dentist about your implantable device beforehand.
- **Power generating equipment, arc welding equipment, and powerful magnets** (which are in some types of equipment or motors) can also interfere with your implantable device.

Electrical interference can make pacemakers speed up or slow down. You might even feel symptoms, just like the ones that you had before you got a pacemaker: dizziness and an irregular heartbeat, for instance. If you ever feel these symptoms while using an electrical device, turn it off or move away.



Getting Checkups

Regular checkups are key for anyone with an implantable device. Your doctor needs to know about your condition and make sure your device is working well. If it isn't, your pacemaker or ICD won't do you any good.

What Happens During a Checkup?

Checking on your pacemaker or ICD is simple, and you won't feel a thing. Your doctor will use a device called a programmer, which is like a computer. Attached to the programmer is a "wand" that he or she will hold over your chest. This wand can pick up signals from your device.

Most pacemakers and ICDs are like little computers. They keep a history of how you've been doing. The

wand picks up this information and sends it to the programmer where the doctor can see it. Your doctor can also use the programmer and wand to change any settings on the device, sort of like a remote control.

In some cases, people with pacemakers may be able to get some checkups over the phone without even leaving the house. You might be able to use a special device that can pick up signals from your pacemaker and transmit them over regular telephone lines. Then experts can check them out and make sure you're doing OK. Telephone monitoring can save time and cut down on the number of checkups you'll need. But it can't fully replace face-to-face meetings with your doctor.

**The battery in a pacemaker or ICD lasts a long time, usually four to six years.
It won't die suddenly, like a flashlight battery.**

How Often Will I Need Checkups?

That depends on the type of device you have and your individual case. Your doctor will probably want to see you several times in the first six months after your surgery. After that, you'll need to go less often. People with basic pacemakers may only need to go in once a year, while those with CRT pacemakers may need to go twice a year. If you have an ICD, you may need a checkup at least once every four months.

How Will I Know When the Battery Gets Low?

People living with implantable devices are often anxious about the battery. But don't worry. The battery in a pacemaker or ICD lasts a long time, usually four to six years. It also won't die suddenly, like batteries in a remote control or flashlight.

During every checkup, your doctor will check the battery of your device. When it reaches a certain point, your doctor will schedule surgery to replace it. This is fairly simple surgery, since only the device beneath the skin needs to be replaced. Usually the doctor can just connect the new device to the old leads, and you'll be out of the hospital the same day you go in.



What Will a Shock Feel Like?

If you've just had an ICD implanted, you may be worried about getting shocked. When will it happen? What will it feel like?

There's no simple answer. One person's experience with an ICD may be different from another's. Most people describe a shock from an ICD as painful, sort of like a kick in the chest. Some people aren't as bothered by them.

How often you get shocks depends on your condition. Many people have ICDs for years without experiencing a single shock. Others get them frequently.

Also, remember that only people who get ICDs get shocks. The electrical pulses from CRT or standard pacemakers are so mild that you won't feel them.

What Should I Do if I Get a Shock?

A shock from an ICD will probably take you by surprise. You should try to sit down and rest for a while. You may feel dizzy, sick, or disoriented.

**Your doctor may want you to call in.
If you're not sure, give your doctor's office a call.**

It's important to have a plan in place beforehand. Before your surgery, you and your doctor should have talked about what you should do if you get a shock. Your doctor may want you to call in. If you're not sure, give your doctor's office a call.

In rare cases, you may get a series of shocks. This will happen if the first shock wasn't enough to get the heart back to a normal rhythm.

Coping With Worry

Being anxious about getting shocked is natural. If you've already had a few shocks, you may feel out of control, never knowing when you might get your next one. For some people, these feelings subside over time.

If your worry is interfering with your life—or making you angry, anxious, or depressed—don't just accept it. Talk to your doctor. Your doctor may be able to help by adjusting the settings on your device. Many people with ICDs find help in support groups where you can talk to others living with ICDs. You may also find that talking to a therapist helps.

No one will tell you that shocks are pleasant. But some people find them reassuring. After all, if you get a shock, it means your ICD may have just saved your life. A shock is proof that your device is working and keeping you healthy.



Coping With Stress

Obviously, there's no way to completely get rid of stress. It's a fact of life. But if you have heart failure, it's important that you reduce the tensions in your life as much as possible. Too much stress can be bad for your health.

The problem is that heart failure can cause stress. Living with a disease can make you feel vulnerable and anxious. That is especially true for people with ICDs. They might worry both about their disease and the possibility of being shocked.

All in all, you might feel a little out of control. But while stress and anxiety may be natural, that doesn't mean you need to accept them. Too many people with heart failure also suffer from needless fear, anger, and depression. Instead, take action. Just making an effort might help you feel better.

Learn to Relax

Learning to relax is key for everyone with heart failure, whether they have an implantable device or not. Relaxation can be achieved with activities like meditation or yoga. If that approach doesn't appeal to you, there are plenty of other ways to relax.

It's important to do things you enjoy. It's a prescription that's easy to follow. Here are some suggestions:

- **Go out with friends and family.** Don't isolate yourself. Get dinner together or catch a movie. Go on a hike together.
- **Take up a new hobby.** Or just get back into an old one.
- **Get active.** Set aside time each day for some physical activity. Take a stroll. Walk the dog. Garden in the yard. Get back into golf, tennis, or whatever sports you used to enjoy.
- **Take time to sit quietly and think every day.**
- **Read a book.**
- **Take a relaxing bath.**

There's no end to the ways that you can relax. Figure out what works for you and stick to it. Don't let the stresses of life overwhelm you.

Getting Support

While learning to relax on your own can help, it may not be enough. Depression is a real risk for many people with heart failure. If you're suffering, don't be ashamed to get help. You're not alone.

Consider joining a support group. These are meetings of other people with heart failure who are dealing with its symptoms and treatment. It can help to meet people who are going through the same things as you. You might also want to talk to a counselor or therapist.

Let your doctor be your first resource. Talk about what you're going through and ask about ways you might feel better. There's help out there. Just ask for it.



Traveling With an Implantable Device

A lot of people who get an ICD, CRT, or standard pacemaker worry that their traveling days are over. That's hardly the case. With a pacemaker or an ICD, you can travel with more confidence than you used to. But planning your trip may take a little extra care.

Planning Ahead

Talk to your doctor before you go. He or she might have some important advice about how to prepare for your trip. Also, your doctor may refer you to a colleague abroad in case of an emergency.

- **Research.** Plan out your trip carefully. Find the names of doctors and hospitals in the area that you're visiting. Give a copy of your itinerary to loved ones at home.

- **If you're taking a flight or cruise, call ahead** to see if the company has any requirements for people with medical conditions. Your doctor may need to fill out a form saying it's safe for you to travel and outlining any special needs you might have.

Make Sure to Pack ...

- **Identification and information about your device.** This is key. Information about your device and its settings are important in case of an emergency. It may also be important for passing through airport security. **You should strongly consider getting medical alert jewelry.**
- **Extra medication.** Make sure you'll have enough, and bring some with you in your carry-on bag.
- **A list of phone numbers to call in an emergency.**

Information about your device and its settings are important in case of an emergency.

Traveling to Your Destination

- **Airport security** makes a lot of people with pacemakers or ICDs nervous. The detector might react to the metal in your implantable device. Tell the security officers that you have an implanted device, and ask for a search by hand. Don't let the guard use a handheld wand. That may interfere with your device, too.
- **If you're on the road or in the air for a long time,** take regular breaks to stretch your legs.

While You're There

- **Stay in touch with civilization.** If you're going to be in a remote area, make sure to bring a cell phone. If you're abroad, rent a cell phone that works in that country. But remember that your cell phone may not work in many rural areas.
- **Don't overdo it.** Don't cut loose just because you're away from home. Eating or drinking too much could make you sick, which is the last thing you want on a vacation. Follow your doctor's recommendations for a healthy diet. Also, don't get yourself too tired out.



Living a Healthy Life

By getting an implantable device, you took an important step toward better health. But your pacemaker or ICD can't do everything for you. You need to take care of yourself and stay well. So take some active steps toward a healthier life.

Get Physically Active

There's more and more evidence that physical activity is good for everyone. But if you have heart failure, which can make getting up to go to the bathroom tiring, exercise may be the last thing on your mind.

Make the effort. Studies have shown that exercise really helps people with heart failure. Over time, exercise can give you more strength and stamina and improve your mood.

So once you've recovered from surgery, talk to your doctor about an exercise plan. Your doctor may suggest walking, biking, or swimming. Just about any kind of exercise is probably OK. However, you should avoid rough sports—like wrestling or football—that could damage your implantable device.

Your ICD or pacemaker has given you a big advantage. The next step is yours.

You'll need to start slowly. Don't do too much at once. **And don't start an exercise plan without your doctor's consent.**

Some people don't like the idea of exercise. **But being physically active doesn't mean you have to take up a sport you don't like.** Instead, you can try to get some exercise in little chunks. Take a quick walk to the store. Use the stairs instead of the escalator at the mall. Park your car a little further away than you have to, so you can get some extra walking. Toss the TV's remote control and change the channels by hand. Every little bit of physical activity can help.

Eat a Healthy Diet

In general, people with heart failure should eat a diet that's low in fat and high in fiber—just like everyone else. Focus on eating fruits and vegetables every day. Try to cut back on fatty meats and sweets. You don't need to give up favorite foods entirely. Just use moderation.

Many people with heart failure have to follow special diets. You may need to cut down on how much salt you eat. You may also need to be careful about how much fluid you take in. Talk to your doctor about specific recommendations. Or ask for a referral to a registered dietitian.

Here are some more tips on how to live a healthy lifestyle:

- **Lose weight (if you're overweight).** Excess weight makes your heart work harder than it has to. It can also lead to serious conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure that can worsen your heart failure.
- **Get enough sleep.** Not getting enough sleep actually increases the risk of heart disease in some people. But sometimes the medicines for heart failure can make it hard to sleep through the night. If that's the case, talk to your doctor about changing your dosing schedule.
- **Don't smoke, and cut down on alcohol and caffeine.**

The Next Step

As you can see, people with implantable ICDs or pacemakers do need to take a few extra precautions. But for the most part, the recommendations for people with implantable devices are the same for anyone else: See your doctor regularly, eat a healthy diet, and exercise.

Having an ICD or a pacemaker isn't going to impose many restrictions on how you live. Instead, it may give you a feeling of freedom that you haven't had in a long time.

Your ICD or pacemaker has given you a big advantage. It can give you a healthier, happier, and longer life. The next step is yours. Now you have to do what you can—with exercise, a good diet, medicine, and regular medical care—to keep yourself well.

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Attending Physician:

First Name

Last Name

Phone Number

Clinic or Practice

Heart Failure Device:

Maker

Model

Implantation Date

Location

Implanting Physician

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St. Jude Medical (www.sjm.com) is dedicated to the design, manufacture, and distribution of innovative cardiovascular devices of the highest quality. The company's product portfolio includes pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs), vascular closure devices, catheters, and heart valves.

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This booklet is the second in the two-part WebMD Guide to heart failure.

Don't miss the first part:
Preparing for Heart Failure Device Therapy
Essential Information for Individuals and Families

Ask your physician for it,
or go to: hf-guide.webmd.com



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