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Capital Health, Nova Scotia
www.cdha.nshealth.ca

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The information in this brochure is provided for information and education purposes only.
The information is not intended to be and does not constitute healthcare or medical advice.
If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to updated every 3 years.
Follow-up care
You should return to the Pacemaker Clinic or your local specialist’s office to have your pacemaker assessed using a special machine called a programmer. This assessment should be done the next business day after the pacemaker is implanted, again at 6 - 8 weeks and once or twice a year thereafter.

Call your doctor if you have:
- dizziness
- shortness of breath
- prolonged hiccups
- prolonged weakness
- chest pain
- fatigue
- ankle and leg swelling
- fainting

Check your incision for infection. Call your doctor immediately if you have any:
- fever (more than 38°C)
- drainage
- redness
- swelling
- increasing soreness

If bleeding occurs:
- Place your hand over the dressing and press firmly.
- Rest quietly until the bleeding stops.
- Contact your doctor if the bleeding continues.
- If bleeding is severe, go to the nearest Emergency Department immediately.

Living With Your Pacemaker

The pamphlet will help you learn what your new pacemaker can do for you.

The heart’s natural pacemaker
Your heart’s natural pacemaker controls the number of times your heart beats. The natural pacemaker sends impulses throughout the heart muscle. These impulses cause your heart muscle to contract and the heart to beat. Blood is then pumped out of the heart to the rest of your body.

Symptoms
Problems with your heartbeat may cause various symptoms. It depends on how your circulation is affected.

The most common symptoms are:
- fainting
- feeling light-headed
- dizziness

Other symptoms may be:
- feeling tired
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- swelling of the feet or ankles

When your heart’s natural pacemaker became inefficient, your doctor recommended an artificial pacemaker be inserted.
What is a pacemaker?

A pacemaker is used to prevent the heart from beating too slowly. It can also be used to increase your heart rate to suit your activity.

The wire or “lead” of the pacemaker is placed in a vein and passed into the heart. The lead is attached to the pacemaker that is placed under the skin in your upper chest. The pacemaker will make a small bulge. You will not be able to see this when you are dressed.

Your pacemaker will only deliver impulses when needed. It is able to sense when your heart beats on its own. The pacemaker will not pace when it detects a natural heart beat. It will be on stand-by. The pacemaker will cut in when the heart rate drops below a preset rate.

The battery is sealed inside the pacemaker. How long your pacemaker lasts will depend on how often the battery is used. The pacemaker will usually last 7 - 10 years. You will need a new pacemaker when the battery runs low. The lead may not need to be changed when the pacemaker is replaced. In the Operating Room (OR), the surgeon will test the lead. If it is working well, the lead is attached to the new pacemaker.

For the next 6 - 8 weeks do not:

- make sudden jerky movements that will cause your arm on the same side as your pacemaker to pull away from your body (like when the leash pulls on your arm while walking the dog).
- apply direct pressure to your pacemaker.
- reach over your head with the arm on the affected side.
- lift heavy objects.

Avoid hard blows to the pacemaker

- Do not play contact sports such as football.
- Do not rest the butt of a gun on the pacemaker.

Comfort

- A woman who has a pacemaker in the upper chest may choose not to wear tight fitting bra straps. A small pad placed under the strap may be helpful. You may lie on the same side as your pacemaker.

Other important points:

- Do not drive or operate any machinery for 24 hours.
- Do not sign any legal documents or important papers for 24 hours.
- Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours.
Identity card (ID) and MedicAlert®
We will give you a temporary ID card before you leave the hospital. Your type of pacemaker and when you received it will be on the card. After about a month, a permanent ID card from the company that made the pacemaker will come in the mail. The information on the card will be helpful if you have to see a doctor who does not know you. Wear a MedicAlert® bracelet at all times.

Activity
You can do your usual activities. If you think that any of your activities may affect your pacemaker, be sure to discuss them with your doctor or Pacemaker Clinic staff. You may be able to do more than you did before you received your pacemaker.

Check with your doctor before doing vigorous exercises such as jogging and hiking.

It will take 6 - 8 weeks for the lead to settle into your heart wall and become secure. Until the lead is firmly fixed in place there is a small chance the lead may move.

If the lead moves you may need additional surgery to reposition it.

Getting ready
- Please read the booklet: *Before and After Day Surgery.* It will tell you when you must stop eating and drinking.
- A man’s chest may need to be shaved.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form.

What happens when my pacemaker is inserted?
- The surgery is done in the Operating Room (OR).
- An intravenous (IV) will be started.
- Medication will be given through the IV to help you relax.
- An area of your chest will be frozen with anaesthetic or you may be put to sleep.

After surgery
- You will be taken to the PACU (Post Anaesthetic Care Unit) where your heart will be monitored for 2 hours.
- An ECG and chest X-ray will be done.
- You will be encouraged to rest quietly. Reduced activity helps the pacemaker settle under the skin in the pacemaker “pocket”.
- A nurse will check your bandage. Your blood pressure and pulse will be taken regularly.
• You will be able to drink and eat as usual.
• Ask for pain medication if needed.
• Before you go home, we will arrange for you to be seen in the Pacemaker Clinic on the next business day.

At Home

Incision
• Steri-Strips® cover the incision site. Keep the Steri-Strips® and dressing clean and dry.
• Change the dressing over the Steri-Strips® every 2-3 days.
• The stitches will dissolve on their own. They do not need to be removed.
• The Steri-Strips® will fall off.
• Keep your incision dry. If it becomes wet, pay dry as well as you can. A shower may be taken as soon as the incision is healed (usually in 1 week).
• Avoid raising your arms above the shoulder line.

Electrical equipment
• Today’s pacemakers are built so well that very few things will interfere with them.
• You may use all the household appliances in your home including a microwave oven.
• Keep all electrical equipment in good repair.
• All power tools should be grounded.
• Tell your dentist, surgeon, physiotherapist and all health care providers that you have a pacemaker.
• You may work with:
  - garden tools
  - wood-working shop tools
  - metal workshop tools
  - photocopiers
  - computers
• You may NOT use an arc welder.
• The use of a chainsaw is not recommended.
• Do not lean over a running engine. Rarely, some equipment or large motors may make the pacemaker think there is a heart beat when there is not. This may make you feel dizzy or faint. The pacemaker will work normally if you move away from the equipment.
• You may use a cellular phone if you take some safety steps. Always keep your cellular phone at least 6 inches away from your pacemaker. Hold the phone on the opposite side from the pacemaker. Do not carry your cellular phone in a pocket over your pacemaker.
• Airport security devices will not harm your pacemaker, but the pacemaker may turn on the alarm. Show the security guard your pacemaker identity card.
• A TENS unit can be worn if you take some safety measures. If needed, ask your nurse or doctor to discuss this with you.
• Avoid powerful magnets. Never have a MRI test, which uses a powerful magnet, unless you have been told that your pacemaker is specifically MRI compatible.
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- shortness of breath
- swelling of the feet or ankles

When your heart’s natural pacemaker became inefficient, your doctor recommended an artificial pacemaker be inserted.
Go to the nearest Emergency Department at your local hospital if you have:

- pain in the calf of your leg that does not resolve with movement or massage
- shortness of breath
- pain in your chest

Remember the purpose of your pacemaker is to help your heart beat properly. This support means you can live a more active life.