

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

## 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 is needed

### How it works

A pacemaker is a device that can protect you against certain types of abnormal heart rhythms by constantly monitoring your heart. The pacemaker is able to detect a slow heart rhythm (bradycardia) and produce electrical impulses to increase your heart rate. If your heartbeat is too slow, there is not enough blood pumped to meet your body's needs. This may make you feel tired, weak, lightheaded or short of breath. A pacemaker restores the proper heart rate and rhythm.

A pacemaker is usually implanted in your upper chest area just below your collarbone. It is about the size of 2 stacked silver dollars. Most weigh an ounce or less. The pacemaker is made up of a pulse generator (battery and electrical circuit) and 1 to 3 wires (pacing leads). The pacing leads are threaded 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. The leads and the generator are connected after proper placement is confirmed. Your physician will program the pacemaker to best fit your specific needs.

### Pacemaker placement

You will receive a phone call with day of surgery instructions the 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.

The pacemaker placement is done in the Electrophysiology Lab. You will receive medication to make you comfortable during surgery. You then will go to a cardiac monitoring unit to recover. Your pacemaker will be checked the next day to see that it is working properly. Before you are discharged, a chest X-ray will be done.

Please call the Northwestern Memorial Hospital Device Clinic at 312.695.1965, TTY 312.926.6363, to make a wound check appointment 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 appointments.

### ***Incision care***

- Do not shower or get the wound bandage wet until after the wound check appointment 7 to 14 days after surgery.
- When you have permission to shower, you may 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 place 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.
- Steri-Strips™ (tape strips) can be removed 1 week after your wound check appointment.
- Protect your incision from the sun to avoid sunburn and decrease scarring.

### ***Activity guidelines***

- Do not drive until you are given instructions about driving at your 1 week follow-up appointment. Driving is usually 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.
- Exercise is encouraged. It is important to start slowly and progress gradually. Be sure to 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.
- Avoid exercise or activity 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 avoid 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.
- Avoid 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 312.926.6363, for information about your pacemaker.

## Follow-up care and appointments

After your pacemaker is implanted, you will have follow-up appointments in the Device Clinic to ensure it is working properly. The pacemaker may be reprogrammed to fit your needs. Part of your follow-up involves checking the battery life of the pacemaker.

If you have a MyNM account, your wound check may be done virtually by sending a photo of the incision to your healthcare provider instead of coming in to the clinic. The clinic staff will contact you if a virtual MyNM wound check is right for you.

### ***Appointments***

It is very important that you keep your follow-up appointments. The Device Clinic is located at:

675 North Saint Clair Street  
19th Floor, Suite 100  
Chicago, Illinois  
312.695.1926  
TTY: 312.926.6363

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

You will need to come back to the Device Clinic for a wound check. Your wound check appointment is on: \_\_\_\_\_

After this visit, you will be seen again in **3 months**. You will then begin remote home monitoring. A remote data transmission will be completed every 3 months for the next year. You will then return to the Device Clinic **once a year for an examination**.

## Living with your pacemaker

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

Keep your device at least 6 inches away from all things magnetic. Normal use of properly operating household appliances should not damage your pacemaker. Microwave ovens and cell phones are safe to use. However, do not carry your cell phone in your shirt pocket over your device. When talking on your cell phone, 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. 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. You cannot have an MRI test. If you need a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) test, please contact the Device Clinic for the clearance process. Dental equipment is safe with a few exceptions. Notify your dentist about your pacemaker before any procedure is performed.

Metal detectors at the airport or at federal buildings will not hurt your device, but they may set off an alarm when you pass through them. Hand-held wands should be avoided. You will need to present your device ID card, let security know you have an implanted device, and security will do a hand pat-down.

### ***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 312.926.6363.