

# You and your pacemaker

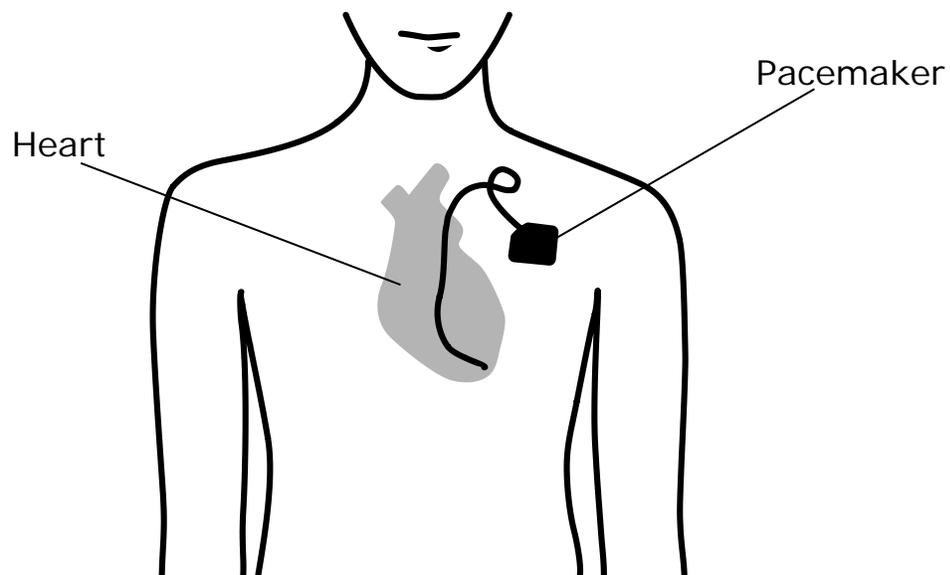
---

## Why do I need a pacemaker?

A pacemaker will help your heart beat at a normal rate.

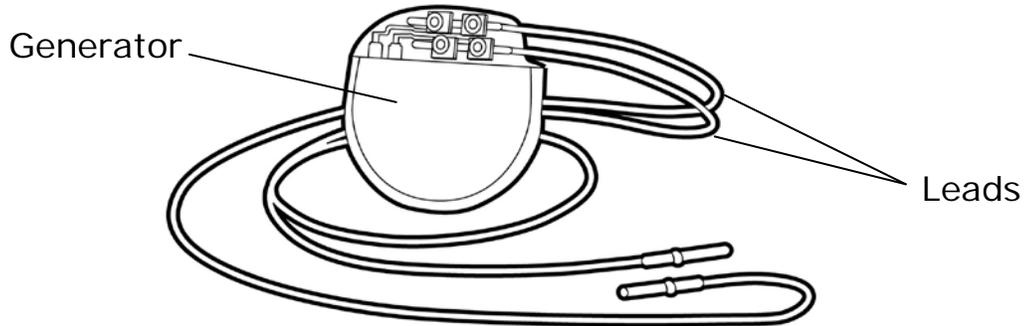
## What is a pacemaker?

A pacemaker is a device inserted into your upper chest just below the skin near your collarbone. This will be done as a minor surgery.



A pacemaker is a 2-part system. Within the pacemaker is:

- a generator or battery that stimulates the heart to beat
- the pacing wires, called leads, lie in your heart and are attached to the pacemaker
- there could be one, two or three leads



The pacemaker monitors your heart beat and rhythm and sends electrical impulses to your heart when needed. An example of this is preventing your heart from beating too slowly. Many patients find that they can return to activities that were restricted before the pacemaker.

## How long does a pacemaker last?

How long a pacemaker lasts will vary between patients. A pacemaker usually lasts from 5 to 10 years.

## What do I need to know right after my surgery?

Follow these guidelines when you return home after your surgery:

### Medications

Take your usual medications unless your doctor tells you something different. You will get special instructions if you are taking blood thinners such as Coumadin<sup>®</sup> or Plavix<sup>®</sup>.

---

## Incision care

- Remove the pressure dressing \_\_\_\_\_
- Remove the white dressing \_\_\_\_\_

If there are small white tapes called steri-strips over the incision, leave them on until your next appointment with the clinic.

Check your incision until the skin edges are healed. The stitches will dissolve and do not need to be taken out. Do not put any powder, lotion, rubbing alcohol or antiseptic solutions on the incision.

You may see bruising and feel sore around the pacemaker site. This is normal and will go away over the next few weeks.

If you have pain, take the pain medication the doctor prescribed. If you do not have a prescription, take an over-the-counter pain medication. If your pain is not relieved by the medication, call the Pacemaker Clinic.

Do not touch the pacemaker site.

## Call the Pacemaker Clinic or your doctor if you have signs of infection:

- the skin around the incision is warm, red or swollen
- the incision has drainage
- you have a fever

## Taking a bath or shower

You may have a bath or shower 72 hours after the procedure. Do not touch the pacemaker site, except to pat dry after bathing or showering.

## Sleeping

You may sleep on the same side as your pacemaker.

---

## Clothing and seat belts

Loose fitting tops may feel better. Many people use a padded seat belt cover over the seat belt for comfort driving. You can buy these or make your own. A small towel folded over your shoulder and pacemaker site may help seat belt pressure. You are required by law to wear your seatbelt.



## Women

You may pad the bra strap around the incision. You may want to try a sports bra, strapless bra or no bra at all.

## Diet

Follow your usual diet.

## Activity

Most people return to their usual activities in a few weeks. Here are some guidelines to follow.

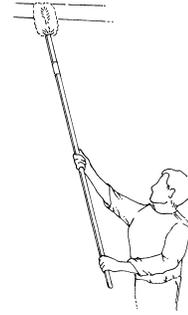
### For 24 hours:

- Rest for 24 hours after the procedure.
- After 24 hours, begin walking for exercise.



**For the next 6 weeks:**

- Avoid upper arm movement on the side of your pacemaker such as reaching high, raking, hanging things and swinging a golf club.
- Do shoulder rolls daily on the side of the pacemaker to prevent shoulder stiffness.
- You can have sex when you feel comfortable.
- Ask your doctor when you can drive.
- Do not do any heavy lifting. This means do not lift anything over 5 kilograms or 10 pounds, such as a bag of groceries, small suitcase or small child.
- No driving for one week after your surgery.



**When do I need to go to the Pacemaker Clinic?**

After your pacemaker has been inserted you will have regular check-ups with the Pacemaker Clinic.

You will be given your first appointment to come to the Pacemaker Clinic within 2 weeks after your surgery.

At your first follow-up visit, expect to be at the clinic for 20 minutes.

- Bring your medications in their original containers from the pharmacy to each clinic visit. If you cannot bring the medications with you, bring an up-to-date list of everything you take.
- At the first clinic visit, your incision will be checked.
- Talk with the pacemaker staff about doing sports such as swimming and heavy exercise such as lifting weights. You can also talk about activities such as heavy yard work, travelling, driving and going back to work at this visit.

- At each clinic visit, you will be asked about symptoms such as dizziness, fainting, fluttering, chest pain, tiredness, hiccupping and breathing problems.
- You may have other tests done during your visit such as an ECG, chest x-ray or bloodwork.



Sometimes adjustments need to be made to your pacemaker. This can be done quickly during your clinic visit.

The clinic staff also checks the pacemaker battery and can tell when the battery power is low and a new one is needed. Batteries last between 5 and 10 years.

You will be given follow-up appointment at each visit.

**At your visits you can talk about all of your questions and concerns. Remember to bring your questions to each visit.**

## Where is the Pacemaker Clinic?

We are located at:

Cardiac Ambulatory Care Clinic  
Hamilton General Hospital  
4 East  
237 Barton Street East  
Hamilton, Ontario

Call the Pacemaker Clinic if you have any **NON-URGENT** questions. Be prepared to leave a message and the clinic staff will call you back.

905-527-4322 Extension 49084 (for appointment questions)

Extension 46687 (non-urgent questions for the  
Nurse Clinician)

---

## When do I need to call the doctor?

Call the Pacemaker Clinic if you have any of the symptoms you had before your pacemaker:

- shortness of breath
- dizziness
- fainting
- prolonged hiccoughing
- prolonged weakness

**If you cannot contact your pacemaker clinic nurse or family doctor, call 911 for an ambulance right away.**

**Do not drive yourself to the hospital.**

## What safety measures do I need to take with a pacemaker?

### Security Check Systems

Before you go through an airport security check system, show the officials your Pacemaker Identification card. The security check will not damage your pacemaker but it may trigger an alarm. When the security check uses a 'wand', tell them to avoid passing over your pacemaker site.

Avoid standing close to security systems found at store exits and libraries. You can walk through them at a normal pace.

### Office equipment

Equipment such as computers, fax machines, and photocopiers are safe to be near and use.



### Medical equipment

Large or powerful magnets affect pacemakers. **Tell all health care professionals that you have a pacemaker before any treatment.**

#### You cannot:

- have a test called an **MRI**. This is done using a machine called a **Magnetic Resonance Imaging Unit**. There are some pacemakers that can go through an MRI but you must check with the clinic first.
- be near electro-cautery units often used in medical offices. If you need to have electro-cautery, your doctor will take special precautions.
- use magnetic therapy as a type of alternative medical treatment.

Before starting any electromagnetic therapy, the therapist needs to contact the company to find out if there are any problems using with a pacemaker.

---

## In the home

Home appliances such as hairdryers, radios, electric blankets, and razors are safe to be near and use. Microwave ovens made after 1977 are safe to be near and use.



Hold electric razors and cell phones on the opposite side of your pacemaker or at least 15 centimetres or 6 inches away from your pacemaker site.

Small home magnets, such as the ones you put on a refrigerator, are safe to be around.

Ham radios may not be safe for some people. This depends on the frequency. Call your pacemaker company to ask about the ham radio you own.

**If you feel dizzy any time you operate a machine, step 5 feet away from the motor right away and you should feel fine again. Avoid this machine in the future.**

### Do not do these activities:

- × Do not use beds that vibrate.
- × Do not use vibrators.
- × Do not fire a gun held to the shoulder on the side of your pacemaker. This can be harmful and painful.

## **Around home, work and community**

### **Large motors**

The power from motors such as chain saws, cars, tractors, lawnmowers and recreational vehicles may confuse a pacemaker. If this happens, you will feel dizzy. Step 5 feet away from the motor right away. The pacemaker should not be damaged.

### **Magnets**

Avoid magnets such as the ones found in junkyards to lift cars or on large cranes.

### **High voltage areas**

High voltage is found around such things as arc welders, smelting furnaces, radio and television transmitters and hydro and radio stations.

If you work in any of these areas, you need to talk to your pacemaker doctor or pacemaker clinic nurse.

---

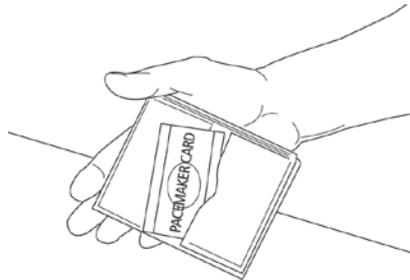
## Other important information

### Pacemaker Identification Card

When you have a pacemaker, you are given a temporary pacemaker identification card in the hospital. The company that made your pacemaker will mail you a permanent card in 10 to 12 weeks.

You need to carry this card with you all the time. A spouse or partner should not carry your card. This card gives members of the health care team information about your type of pacemaker and how it works.

Tell any new health professionals such as doctors, dentists, physiotherapists and chiropractors that you have a pacemaker before any care is started.



### Medical Alert® Identification

It is a good idea to wear Medical Alert® identification. You can pick up an order form from your pharmacy. The identification should say "pacemaker".



