



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Frequently asked questions about ICD

Issued by Cardiology



Implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) are implanted to help protect you from dangerously fast heart rhythms. We know that many of our patients have some questions about their Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillators (ICD) which they may only think of after they go home. It is completely natural to feel a bit worried about living with your defibrillator. These are some of the questions which other patients have frequently asked us.

We hope this information sheet may help. Please ask us if you have any other questions.

Getting back to normal life

Early days:

Q. How long will it take to heal?

A. It takes about 6 weeks. If you notice any redness, soreness or swelling, please contact the ICD clinic. It is important to avoid reaching with the arm closest to the device or heavy lifting during this time to avoid dislodging the leads.

Q. Is it normal to feel the box and leads and why is it more visible in some people?

A. Several factors affect this. It depends on the shape of the chest wall, the size and shape of the device and leads and any previous scar tissue.

Q. Is it normal to feel a bit upset or down once the ICD has been implanted?

A. After the device has been implanted, you may feel a bit low as you adjust to having the device. It can help to talk to someone about this. Often your GP can help and the cardiology team are always here to listen.

Later on:

Q. Do long haul flights affect the device?

A. No, just remember to inform airport security and take your ID card with you, as with any flight.

Q. Is it safe to have sex while living with an ICD?

A. It is generally safe to continue with this activity. Even if you did receive a shock during intercourse it would not cause any harm to your partner.

Q. What about the proximity of DIY equipment and electromagnetic devices?

A. Electromagnetic energy can interfere with the device but newer devices are very good at filtering it out. Most home DIY machines are fine but avoid ARC welding, chain saws and big alternators. It is important to note that you can pass through the security barriers in shops without problem but not to linger and chat in close proximity to them. Induction hobs are best avoided. Don't keep your mobile phone in a chest pocket directly over the device.

Q. Can I do any sports and exercise?

A. Generally you should be able to do at least as much as you were doing before the device was implanted. Contact sports are not a good idea as the device can become damaged. Swimming is fine once the wound has healed but avoid swimming alone in a private pool/sea.

Common concerns:

CPR will not damage a device or stop it from working; other heart rhythms or reasons might cause a cardiac arrest other than the fast rhythm the device is programmed for. CPR will keep the blood circulating.

Q. Can you use an AED (external defibrillator) on a patient with ICD?

A. In the very rare event that the ICD does not work by the time you have located and unpacked the AED it is worth putting the AED on the patient to see rhythm and follow AED's advice.

Q. If other surgery is subsequently needed, the ICD needs to be turned off. Why and how?

A. The device is turned off because some of the equipment used in surgery may cause electrical interference and cause you to receive an un-necessary shock. One of the technicians would adjust the device not to shock just before surgery and turn it back on just after. In an emergency they may use a magnet to deactivate shocks. The surgeon will then know that the device is deactivated and they will be responsible for the heart during the surgery and must take any necessary action.

Q. How long does the battery last?

A. That depends on how much energy is used and how often it needs to pace or deliver shocks, e.g. if three leads are used all the time then the battery life is 5-7 years. In the case of one lead ICD the battery would probably last 10 years.

Q. How do I know the ICD is working?

A. The devices are very effective and it is exceptionally unusual for it to stop working. Regular checkups and remote monitoring alert us to any problems which may lead to the device not working effectively.

Q. Can I have a MRI scan?

A. Yes, in certain circumstances. It is best to speak to the Cardiology department if an MRI is being considered.

Q. Can the implant get warm?

A. Not usually. The skin may get warm if there is an infection. Signs of infection are an increase in redness, discharge or pain. Also the muscle may be a bit stretched with the weight of the device and feel a little different.

If the site is consistently warm and red you must get it checked by our team in the cardiology department.

What to do if your device gives you treatment

Q. Will I feel the treatment from the ICD?

A. If the device tries to use pacemaker impulses to stop the abnormal heart rhythm (Anti Tachycardia Pacing or ATP) you may not even know it has happened. You may feel palpitations or dizziness. The device may need to give you a shock and these have been described by patients as feeling like being kicked or punched in the chest. They can be painful but the feeling only lasts a few seconds. Some people may not feel anything if their heart is beating so fast that it has caused them to blackout.

Q. If I get a shock will it harm anyone touching me?

A. Absolutely not. They may notice your body jolt but no electricity will reach them.

Q. What should I do if it activates?

A. If it activates and you feel well, contact the cardiology department at Wansbeck General Hospital as soon as it opens on the next working day to arrange for the device to be interrogated.

If it activates and you feel unwell, dial 999 or get someone to drive you to The Northumbria at Cramlington.

If it activates on multiple occasions, dial 999.

Do not drive if you think you may have received a shock

If you are near to your remote monitor, it is a good idea to go to your monitor (or if it's a cellular kind, have it brought to you) and begin a manual download. This is so that the cardiology department can quickly access the information from your device before you attend the hospital. To begin a manual download, if the device is in hibernation mode, press the white button to wake it up then press again to transmit. It will beep on manual transmission.

Driving

The DVLA have very strict guidance about whether patients who have an ICD are safe to drive. These are available on the website. DVLA medical queries telephone 0300 7906806.

Remember to tell your insurance company about the ICD.

Q. When can I drive after the ICD has been implanted?

A. This depends on the reason the device was implanted and any symptoms you had before. If it is for prevention and you have never had any rhythm problems you can drive after four weeks.

Q. How long does it usually take to get your driving licence back if you have had to stop driving?

A. The rules depend on if you receive pacing therapy or a shock and if you were incapacitated (i.e. dizzy/unconscious) at the time. We will advise you when you come for your check. A shock will have an automatic driving ban.

Remote monitoring

Q. Where is best to place the home monitor?

A. It should be placed somewhere that you spend a lot of time, for example the bedroom or living room.

Q. How will I know if there is an unexpected problem with the battery or lead?

A. Many of the actual implantable devices will vibrate or buzz if there is a serious problem. The remote monitoring system will also inform us if there are any problems with the device so we can get in touch with you.

Q. How often does the hospital check the information from my remote monitoring?

A. The company e-mails alerts about any patients who have had any potential problems identified on their device to the department daily. We will also often schedule a remote monitoring follow up at a particular time to avoid you having to come to the clinic in person.

Q. What happens if I go on holiday?

A. If you have the cellular (mobile network) home monitor then you can take it with you, if you are holidaying in the UK, but it will not work abroad. Those plugged into a landline socket cannot be taken on holiday. If you go on holiday it is wise to inform the hospital as, if the monitor cannot find you for a period of time it will alert the hospital.

Q. What if I am in a remote location with no cell reception?

A. The machine will store the information and send when it receives a signal.

Q. Which network does the monitor use?

A. A German network, which then monitors over all networks.

Q. How close do I need to be to my monitor?

A. The first set up needs to be done at arm's length, after that you need to be within 10 feet (3m) for it to read the information. It cannot read through walls so it is best to place it on your bedside table or on the floor at your side of the bed.

Q. Who monitors it overnight?

A. If an event occurs overnight the device will pick it up and we will see it the next working morning. If an alert is flagged as a red alert (e.g. a shock) we will ring you when we are aware of it. However, do not wait for us to ring you if you know you have had a shock.

Q. If my ICD has been changed; do I need a new monitor?

A. If you have a monitor that plugs into a landline that will need to be changed, it may be possible to reprogram a new device to a cellular monitor.

Q. Does the hospital alert the DVLA about red alerts?

A. No, we rely on patients to communicate with the DVLA, we just offer you advice.

Contact details

The cardiology department
Wansbeck General Hospital
01670 529794

Useful Websites

www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk
www.bhf.org.uk

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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