

Follow Up Visits

You will be sent regular appointment letters to attend a pacemaker clinic at your hospital. Your Cardiac Physiologist will communicate with your pacemaker, make adjustments to optimise its settings to fit your individual needs and monitor the battery life. The battery will indicate when it is nearing 'replacement time'. When this replacement indicator is reached, you have many months of battery life left. (Like a petrol gauge in a car, which indicates you need to fill up long before you run out of petrol). You will then be scheduled for a pacemaker change which is generally a quicker procedure than the initial pacemaker implant as the leads do not have to be altered.

Living with your Pacemaker

It is natural for you to feel anxious or nervous about receiving a pacemaker. If you have any questions, ask your nurse, Cardiac Physiologist or Cardiologist. In time you hopefully will forget you have a pacemaker and enjoy a better quality of life.

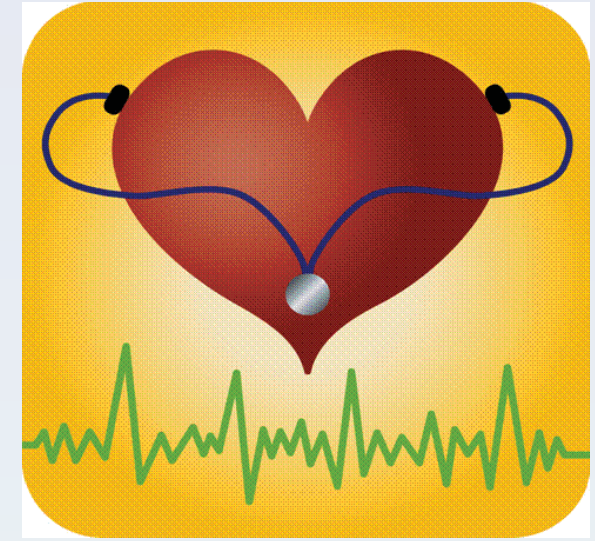
Important Safety Information

Most medical procedures do not interfere with your pacemaker, however, an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan can damage it, therefore, you may NOT have an MRI scan after your pacemaker implant. If you have an existing condition that will require you to have an MRI in the future, please discuss this with your Cardiologist before your implant as there are options available. Always tell your health professional you have an implanted device before any procedure.

Your device has built in features that will protect it from interference produced by most electrical equipment. Most of the things that you handle on a daily basis are not going to affect your device. However, your device is sensitive to very strong electromagnetic fields, such as at Manapouri Power Plant. Your Cardiac Physiologist will explain about this at your pacemaker check before you leave the hospital.

Driving

The Ministry of Transport recommends that you should not drive a private motor vehicle for at least two weeks following a pacemaker implant. For commercial drivers and patients with dizzy spells, the stand down period will be longer.



Pacemaker Information

Your doctor has recommended a Pacemaker system to treat your slow heart rhythm. A pacemaker is designed to monitor and treat heart rhythm problems, greatly reducing the risks that are associated with them.

This handout will explain briefly how a heart works and how a pacemaker can treat your slow rhythm. After your pacemaker implant, your device will be checked by a qualified Cardiac Physiologist before leaving the hospital. At this check, you have the chance to ask questions regarding your device and will be given a booklet which is relevant to your device which may help answer some of the questions about your heart and your pacemaker system.

The Human Heart

Your heart is a muscle about the size of your fist. It works as a mechanical pump and an electrical organ. It is able to beat because it produces electrical impulses which follow a pathway (see picture) causing the muscle contraction that pumps blood through your body.

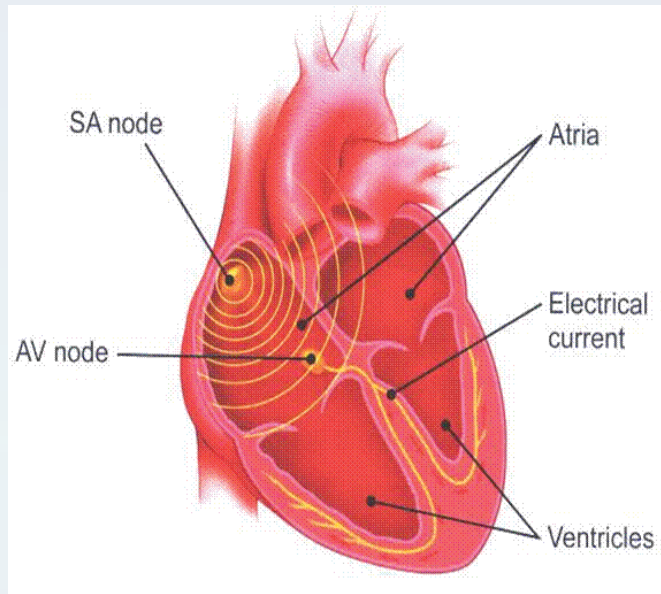


Figure 1. The heart and its electrical pathways.

The most common medical conditions requiring a pacemaker are called “Bradycardia” and “Heart Block”. These are where the heart beats too slowly to supply the proper amount of blood to your body. This can make you feel very tired, dizzy or faint.

A Pacemaker System

A pacemaker system is made up of a device (or pulse generator) and a lead – depending on your specific condition, there can be one, two or three leads.

Device

The device is a small computer which runs on a lithium battery sealed into a metal case. The battery typically lasts several years.

Lead

A lead is a small insulated wire that is implanted into your heart and connected to the device. A pacing lead carries the electrical impulse from the device to your heart muscle to make your heart beat. A pacing lead can also relay information about your own heart’s rhythm back to the device.

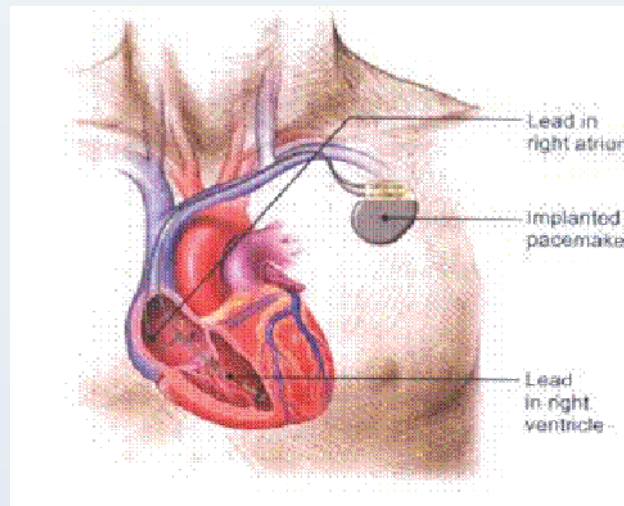


Figure 5. An implanted dual-chamber pacemaker system.

Pacemaker

A pacemaker is implanted during a surgical procedure. You will not be completely anaesthetised but to keep you comfortable, you will be given sedation and a local injection to numb the area.

During your procedure, your doctor will insert the lead into a vein through a small insertion near the collarbone. It is then passed through the vein and into your heart where the tip of the lead will rest against your heart’s inner wall.

The device will be tested and the incision closed. You may experience some discomfort from the incision area as you recover from the surgery.

Common Instructions Post Implant

- Keep your arm still overnight. This allows the leads to ‘settle’. The next few weeks you can gently exercise your arms through a full range of movement building up to full normal activities within four to six weeks.
- Your nurse will give you instructions regarding at-home care
- Contact your health team if you develop a fever or the area becomes red or irritated in any way.
- Avoid rubbing your device or the surrounding chest area.