

# Living with your implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)

**This leaflet is a general guide on living with and adapting to life with your implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD). It does not replace the information and individual advice we give you in person.**

**Please ask if you have any questions or need further information.**

## What is an ICD?

An ICD (sometimes called a “defib”) is used to regulate your heartbeat and can help if your heart beats too fast. It constantly monitors the heartbeat for an abnormal rhythm. It can pace the heart back to a normal rhythm or give a shock to return the heartbeat to a normal rhythm.

ICDs are used for patients who have potentially dangerous, fast heart rhythms, known as ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation

## What should I expect when I leave hospital?

### Before you leave the hospital:

- We will check that the device is working properly.
- We will make a follow-up appointment for you.
- We will post out an identification card for you.

It is important to keep your identification card with you at all times and to show it to medical and dental staff before you have any treatment. This also helps us to easily identify the manufacturer of your ICD.

## How do I take care of my wound when I leave hospital?

### The first few days after your operation

Please keep the dressing in place over the wound for the first seven days. You can remove the dressing after seven days, but keep the wound dry until it has healed. This will reduce the risk of infection.

### Two to four weeks after your operation

Please avoid putting strain on your wound. This means that you should not take part in any activity that involves lifting your elbow above shoulder level. You will need to avoid lifting any heavy objects and taking part in sports.

## Stitches

For most patients we use dissolvable stitches that fade away over time. Sometimes we have to use removable stitches.

You should immediately contact the Nursing team on **01422 224524** if you experience any of the following:

- a fever or chills
- the wound becomes red, sore or swollen
- there is a discharge.

These may indicate an infection, but this can usually be treated with a course of antibiotics.

## Will I have follow-up appointments?

Initially, you will need to come to the hospital for your first appointment then we will schedule remote appointments usually every six months to have your ICD checked by a cardiac physiologist – a healthcare professional trained to carry out diagnostic and analytical procedures for heart patients.

We will make your first follow-up appointment and post it out. This will be six to eight weeks after your ICD has been fitted. We will offer you a remote monitor to keep at home to help ensure the ICD is working well.

The home monitor posted out to you, its important you set this up when you get home and keep it plugged in. Please do **not** send any transmissions unless requested to by a Cardiac Physiologist. Home monitors send information automatically so you do not, unless instructed, need to do anything. The home monitor may light up from time to time, this is to do an update and seft test and its **not** asking you to send a transmission.

Follow-up appointments are important to make sure that your device is programmed correctly so that the battery lasts as long as possible. Please remember to bring a list of your medications with you to any clinic appointments.

If the physiologist has any concerns about your ICD or your health, he or she can refer you to a doctor for further checks.

## Can I bring someone with me to my appointment?

You are welcome to bring a friend or relative with you to the appointment.

## What will happen at my appointment?

The cardiac physiologist will take you from the waiting area to one of the pacing rooms for your check-up. We may ask you to undo your shirt or blouse buttons and to lie on the couch. (Women can keep their bras on.)

We may place electrodes (small sticky patches) on your arms and legs or chest to test the electrical activity of your heart with an ECG (electrocardiogram).

We then put a special device over your ICD to carry out certain tests. These may include temporarily reducing and increasing the pacing rate of the device. We will explain what we are about to do and what you can expect before carrying out any tests. Modern ICDs are capable of storing data. If you have had any problems with the device, please tell the cardiac physiologist during the appointment.

The appointment will usually take around 25 minutes.

## How am I likely to feel after having my ICD implanted?

Some patients may feel a little anxious after having an ICD implanted. If you are finding it hard to adjust living with your ICD or if you have any concerns, please contact the ICD clinic.

You may find it helpful to join a patient support group where you can share experiences with other patients in the same situation. If you are interested in finding out more, please ask us for details. Your GP may also be able to refer you to local services.

## What do I do if I receive a shock from the ICD?

- If you receive one shock from your ICD but otherwise feel well, please phone the ICD clinic on **01422 224310** (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm). Clinic staff will advise next steps. If this happens outside of office hours or over the weekend, you should phone the clinic when it is next open.
- If you receive one shock and feel unwell – or if you receive more than one shock – please ring **999**. You will be taken to the accident and emergency department at your local hospital.

## What do I do if I feel generally unwell?

You should always contact your GP first if you have a general medical problem. If your GP feels the problem is related to your heart condition, he or she can always refer you to us.

## Do I need to tell healthcare staff that I have an ICD?

If you are seeing a doctor, dentist or any other healthcare professional, please remember to tell them that you have an ICD and show them your ID card. This will allow them to check that any planned treatment will not interfere with your ICD. For example, MRI scanning, radiotherapy or surgery.

You may consider wearing a MedicAlert bracelet to let healthcare staff know that you have an ICD. You can find more information online at [www.medicalert.co.uk](http://www.medicalert.co.uk) or by calling **020 7833 3034**.

## Can I exercise with an ICD?

Exertion can sometimes start abnormal rhythms in some patients, but everyone is different. Please discuss your individual situation with your cardiologist to find out if and when you can start exercising.

You should avoid doing certain sports alone. For example, swimming or skiing. These situations could be dangerous if you were to receive a shock from the ICD.

There is a small risk of damage to your ICD from a very forceful contact. Please avoid heavy contact sports, such as rugby and kickboxing.

## Can I drive with an ICD?

If you have a driving licence, you may need to tell the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) that you have an ICD. This is because abnormal heart rhythms can affect your ability to drive safely. Your cardiologist or pacing clinic will be able to advise on this.

If it is necessary for you to inform the DVLA, you can do this by downloading or requesting the medical questionnaire 'H1' from the website [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). After completing the form, please send it to DVLA by:

Fax: **0845 850 0095** or  
Post: **Drivers Medical Group**  
**DVLA**  
**Swansea**  
**SA99 1DF**

The DVLA will write to your cardiology consultant who will complete a form about your health and your ICD. The DVLA will then make a decision about your suitability to drive and will send you details.

Remember that you must wear a seatbelt while driving.

## Can I travel abroad?

There are no formal restrictions to travelling abroad. Please remember to take your identification card with you and ensure you have adequate medical insurance. If you plan to be away for a long time, please discuss this with us at the pacing clinic as it may affect your check-up schedule.

## Will security scanning equipment affect my ICD?

Security screening devices in shops and libraries are unlikely to affect your ICD. However it is best to walk straight through rather than linger between the frames of the device. Please remember to show your ID card to security staff before you go through the barrier at airports and follow their instructions.

## Do household items affect my ICD?

ICDs are screened against mobile and cordless phone interference. We recommend that you keep your phone at least six inches (15 centimetres) away from your ICD as a precaution. This simply means using your phone on the opposite side from where your ICD is fitted.

Please do not keep your mobile in a shirt or jacket pocket close to your ICD, even if the phone is switched off.

If your microwave oven is properly maintained, it will not affect your ICD.

If a magnet is placed very close to your ICD, it will deactivate the device for the period it is in close contact with the ICD. We sometimes use magnets in hospital to stop ICDs activating unnecessarily. You should avoid placing magnets close to your ICD and avoid exceptionally strong (industrial) magnets. Remember that magnets can be found in many electronic devices, including hi-fi speakers.

Normal household appliances, such as your television, radio or computer are all fine to use with your ICD. Gardening equipment is also fine, but do not drape power cables over your device. If you have any worries about interaction with specific equipment or items, please call the pacing clinic and we will be happy to help.

## Sex and your ICD

An ICD should not affect your ability to have sex. If you receive a shock from the ICD, it does not affect anyone who is in contact with you at the time.

If you have any questions regarding sex and your ICD, please ask your cardiologist.

## When can I return to work?

You should be able to return to work as soon as your wound has fully healed and it feels comfortable. Please discuss this with your cardiologist as different people feel ready to return to work at different times.

It is important to remember that some jobs and working environments can affect your ICD. These include:

- Arc welding.
- Areas where industrial magnets are used – for example, scrap metal yards.
- Working with television, radio or radar transmission equipment.
- Military installations.
- Jobs that involve carrying hi-fi or PA speakers, or any other equipment containing magnets.

You should also avoid activities where it could be dangerous if you received a shock such as climbing ladders or scaffolding.

If you have any concerns about work – particularly if you work in any of the areas mentioned here – please discuss these with your cardiologist.

## Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact the pacing clinic on **01422 224310** (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).

### Here are some websites you may find useful:

British Heart Foundation [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

The British Heart Foundation produces a leaflet for ICD patients – we can provide you with a copy.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

Heart Rhythm Society [www.hrsonline.org](http://www.hrsonline.org)

Arrhythmia Alliance [www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk](http://www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk)

Medtronic (ICD manufacturer) [www.medtronic.com](http://www.medtronic.com)

Boston scientific (ICD manufacturer) [www.guidant.com](http://www.guidant.com)

St Jude Medical (ICD manufacturer) [www.SJM.com](http://www.SJM.com)

We cannot take responsibility for inaccuracies or omissions in these websites. Please talk to your cardiologist if you have any questions.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Cardiac Device Team

Telephone: 01422 224310

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ یا زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو  
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم  
المذكور أعلاه"