

Living with a Pacemaker



After you have a pacemaker implanted, you can do almost everything you did before your surgery. Here are tips for living well with a pacemaker.

Carry an ID card

When you first get your pacemaker, you'll be given an ID card to carry with you. This card has important information about the device. Show it to any doctor, dentist, or other healthcare provider you visit. Pacemakers may set off metal detectors. So you may need to show your card to security personnel, such as those at the airport security checkpoint.

What to watch for

- **Be careful when using cell phones and electronic devices.** Keep them at least 6 inches away from your pacemaker. It's safest to hold all cell phones to the ear farthest from your pacemaker or use the speaker mode setting. Don't carry your phone or electronic device in your chest pocket, over the pacemaker. Experts advise carrying your cell phone and other electronics in a pocket or bag below your waist. Most cell phones and electronic devices don't interfere with pacemakers. But some cell phones and electronic devices, such as smart watches, use powerful magnets for wireless charging that may interfere with the normal function of your pacemaker. The magnet used for charging or other magnet accessories can also interfere with the normal function of your pacemaker. These devices should be stored away from your pacemaker. Follow any other instructions given to you by your healthcare provider or from the maker of your pacemaker.
- **Stay away from very strong magnets.** These include handheld security wands, metal detectors, and anti-theft systems often found in the workplace, airport, or other high-security areas. Show your ID card when you go through security. They also include MRI machines. Many pacemaker devices are considered safe for having an MRI (MR-conditional devices). But safety precautions must still be used. Check with your pacemaker healthcare provider for clearance if you need an MRI.
- **Stay away from strong electrical fields.** These are made by radio transmitting towers and ham radios. They are also made by heavy-duty electrical equipment. A running engine makes an electrical field. Don't lean over the open hood of a running car and avoid working on alternators. If you use any large power tools, such as an industrial arc welder, talk to your healthcare provider. Most household and yard appliances will not cause any problems.
- **Call your healthcare provider if you have any symptoms that your pacemaker isn't working correctly.** These include dizziness or palpitations.



If a signal interferes

If your pacemaker is near one of the devices described above, it may interfere with the electrical signal and stop the pacemaker from working correctly. If you think you were exposed to a signal like this, call your healthcare provider and explain what happened. Also call your healthcare provider if you sense any interference with your device.

What's OK

Below are some of the many things that are **safe** to use when you have a pacemaker:

- Microwave ovens
- Computers
- Hair dryers
- Household power tools
- Radios, TVs, and CD players
- Bluetooth headsets
- Electric blankets and heating pads
- Vacuum cleaners
- Riding in a car

Follow up

Plan to have regular checkups with your healthcare provider to check the battery life of your pacemaker. Your provider can also make sure the pacemaker is working correctly. For many devices, device function and battery life can be checked with a remote monitor set up in your home. On average, this should happen every 6 months, or as advised by your healthcare provider.

Battery life, lead wire condition, and various functions are checked by doing a device interrogation. During an interrogation, the device is connected to a device programmer using a special wand placed on the skin over the

pacemaker. The data is sent from the device to the programmer and assessed. Most in-home device interrogation systems use wireless technology to connect the device to special equipment. The equipment records the data and sends the information to your healthcare provider.

Depending on your device and how much your body uses the pacing functions of the pacemaker, you will need a new pacemaker generator (or battery) implanted at some point, usually about every 10 years.

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