



Patient & Family Guide  
2016

# Living With Your Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD)

Aussi disponible en français :  
*Vivre avec votre défibrillateur cardioveteur  
implantable (DCI)* (FF85-1719)



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Living With Your ICD

Your doctor has recommended an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) for your heart problem. This booklet will help you learn about this device.

## How your heart beats

The heart has an electrical system that controls how fast or slow your heart beats. A normal heartbeat starts from the top part of your heart (atria) and spreads to the bottom part of the heart (ventricles). This lets the heart fill with blood that is then sent out to your body.

If your heartbeat starts from the bottom of your heart, your heart pumps less blood to your body. This can make you feel dizzy or pass out.

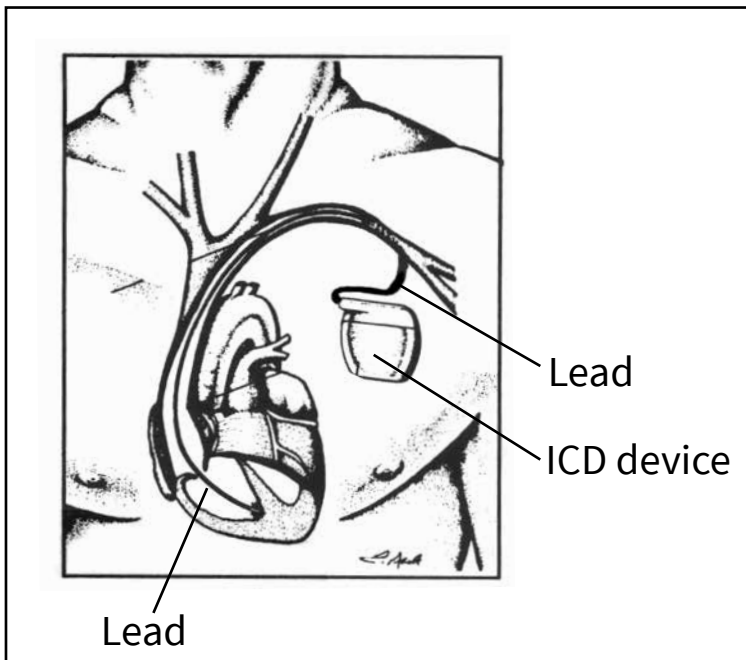
## Common symptoms of a dangerously fast heartbeat:

- › Fainting
- › Light-headedness
- › Dizziness
- › Weakness
- › A “fluttering” feeling in your chest

## What is an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)?

An ICD finds and corrects dangerously fast heart rates that start in the bottom of your heart. The device is also a pacemaker, which can treat slow heart rates. You will need surgery to have the device placed in your body.

A thin, insulated wire called a lead (“leed”) is placed in a vein and passed into your heart. It is placed in the right ventricle (lower right chamber of your heart). Sometimes a lead is placed in the upper chamber as well. The lead is attached to the ICD device. These leads sense your heart rate and rhythm and correct them.



A battery is sealed inside the device. The battery will last about 5 years depending on how much it is used. When the battery is low, you will need a new device. You will probably not need a new lead when the device is changed.

**An ICD works to:**

- › Sense a dangerously fast heart rate and rhythm
- › Correct this rate and rhythm
- › Store information about a period of abnormal heart rhythm
- › Slow the pace of certain fast heart rates
- › Pace for a slow heart rate

Your heart rhythm determines what type of treatment your device gives you. The device senses when your heart is beating dangerously fast or slow. Treatment then returns the heart to a normal rate.

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your healthcare provider. We are here to help you.

## Treatment types

Your doctor decides how fast your heart has to beat before it gets treatment from your device.

### Pacing

- › This could feel like a brief fluttering in your chest. You may not feel this treatment at all.

### Shock therapy

- › You may need a shock if you have a dangerously fast heart rate. This treatment could feel like an uncomfortable thump in your chest.

## Getting ready

- Do not eat or drink after midnight the day the device will be inserted (put in). You may be able to have a light breakfast, if your surgery is planned for the afternoon.
- A nurse may use clippers to get rid of hair on your chest, if needed.
- Please use skin cleanser the night before and morning of your surgery.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form.

## **What happens when the ICD device is inserted?**

- A doctor and anesthesiologist (doctor who will give you medication to make you sleepy) will see you before your surgery.
- The doctor will make a small incision (cut) in your upper chest so that he or she can insert the lead into a vein going into your heart.
- The device will also be placed under your skin through this incision. The device may look like a lump under your skin.
- The device will be tested during the surgery to make sure that it is working well. You will not feel this testing.

## **After surgery**

- An electrocardiogram (ECG) and chest X-ray will be done.
- A nurse will check your bandage.
- You will be able to eat and drink as usual.
- You may have swelling and tenderness around the incision for a few days. Ask for pain medication if needed.
- Plans will be made for you to visit the Pacemaker Clinic within 2-3 days after your surgery.

- In the Clinic, a special machine called a programmer will check your ICD. This does not hurt. Something that looks like a large bar of soap is placed on your chest. This is attached to a computer so we can see how your device is working.
- Your device will be checked twice a year in an ICD Clinic or through a home monitoring device.

## Activities

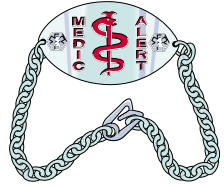
### For the next 6-8 weeks:

- **Do not** make any sudden jerky movements that will cause your arm on the same side as your ICD device to pull away from your body (such as when a leash pulls on your arm while walking a dog).
- **Do not** put direct pressure on your device.
- **Do not** reach your arm on the same side as your ICD over your head.

Before you leave the hospital, your nurse will talk with you about any other limits to your activity.

## Identity (ID) card and MedicAlert®

You will be given a temporary ID card before you leave the hospital. The type of device and the date it was inserted will be on this card.



Within a couple of months, the company that made the device will mail you a permanent ID card. This card will be helpful if you have to see a doctor who does not know you. Ask for a MedicAlert® bracelet application before you leave the hospital. You should always wear a MedicAlert® bracelet.

## At home

### What should I do if I get a shock from my ICD?

You may never get a shock from your device, but if you do, you should:

- Rest by lying or sitting down right away.
- Call the Clinic as soon as possible to tell them that you have received a shock. The device will need to be checked in the Clinic.
- If you have more than one shock, have someone take you to the nearest Emergency Department.

Tell your family doctor if you have any other problems.



## Care of your incision

- Keep your incision dry.
- You can take a shower as soon as your incision is healed (usually in 1 week).
- Wear comfortable, loose clothing.
- Your stitches will go away on their own. They do not need to be taken out.

**Check your incision for infection. Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms of infection:**

- › Fever over 38° C/100° F
- › Drainage from the incision
- › Redness
- › Swelling
- › More soreness than usual

**What are your questions?  
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## Electrical equipment

- Household appliances, including microwaves, are safe to use.
- Keep all electrical appliances and power tools properly grounded and in good repair. This includes gardening tools, and workshop and office equipment.
- Tell your dentist and/or your other healthcare providers that you have an ICD device.
- Do not lean over a running engine. Some equipment or large motors may interfere with the way the device works. This may make you feel dizzy or faint. The device will work normally if you move away from the equipment.
- You may use a smart phone if you take some safety steps. Keep your smart phone at least 6 inches away from your ICD device. Do not carry your smart phone in a pocket over your ICD device.
- Walk normally through theft detectors at entrances to stores and airport screening detectors. Your device may set off the alarm, however it will work normally. Show your ID card for your device and **ask for a pat down search but ask that they do not use a hand-held sensor.**

## Call 911 if you have any of the following symptoms:

- › **Feeling faint**
- › **Dizziness**
- › **Heart fluttering**
- › **Heart racing**

This pamphlet is only an introduction to your ICD device. We will help you learn more about your device before you go home. **Remember**, your device will help you to live as full a life as possible.

### Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute healthcare or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.