

Activities of Daily Living After Getting a Pacemaker or Defibrillator

Precautions and self-care

This handout gives important safety guidelines to follow after getting a pacemaker or defibrillator.

Why do I need to follow safety guidelines?

You will need to protect your device after surgery. Until your care team tells you otherwise, follow the safety guidelines (*precautions*) in this handout.

For the first 24 hours after your surgery:

- **Wear a sling.** After 24 hours, you may take it off. If you choose to continue wearing the sling for comfort, take it off every 2 hours to allow your arm to stretch within your precautions.

For the first 30 days after your surgery:

With the arm that is on the same side as your surgery (surgical arm):

- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 10 to 15 pounds. (For example, most vacuum cleaners weigh about 10 pounds.)
- Do **not** reach behind you to put on a bra or any other type of clothing.
- Do **not** lift your elbow higher than your shoulder.
- Do **not** put your arm behind your back.
- Do **not** make any sudden movements with your surgical arm.



Ask for help when reaching for anything above shoulder height.

Activities

Standing up from sitting:

- Do **not** push off with your surgical arm.

Putting on a shirt, blouse, jacket, or coat:

- Slide your surgical arm into the sleeve.
- With your other arm, gently slide the shirt over your shoulder and around your back.
- Slide your other arm into the other sleeve.



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Taking off a shirt, blouse, jacket, or coat:

- Carefully remove the sleeve from your non-surgical arm.
- Using your non-surgical hand:
 - Gather your shirt and pull it towards your surgical side.
 - Pull the shirt off your surgical arm.

Putting on your pants, shorts or underwear:

- Sit in a chair. Lift 1 leg at a time and slip it into a pant leg until your foot is through.
- With both feet firmly on the ground, hold onto your pants and stand up.
- Pull your pants over your hips. Make sure your surgical arm does **not** go behind your back.

Taking off your pants, skirt, or underwear:

- If you need to reach behind your back to pull down your pants, only use your non-surgical arm.

Putting on your shoes and socks:

- Sit in a chair. Lift 1 leg and place that ankle on top of the other knee, or on another chair.
- With your hands, slide the sock or shoe over your toes.
- Gently pull the sock or shoe over your foot.
- Repeat for the other foot.

Putting on a bra:

Please talk with your occupational therapist about wearing a bra.

Bathing:

- **For 72 hours:** Do **not** get your incision wet. After 72 hours, you may remove the dressing to shower. After the shower, gently pat the incision dry. **Do not** apply any creams, ointments, or lotion on the incision site until it is fully healed.
- **For 6 weeks** (or until your doctor says it is OK): Do **not** take a bath or do any other water activities that will soak your incision.
- When you shower:
 - Wash your incision, gently massaging soap on the area with your fingers or a washcloth. Do **not** scrub your skin or wound.
 - Use your non-surgical arm to wash, rinse, and dry areas that are hard to reach, such as your head, back, and legs.

Other activities:

- Follow your doctor's instructions about driving and sexual activity.
- Check with your doctor before you do any activities that use your arms including swimming, golfing, playing tennis, shooting a gun, wrestling, playing football, vacuuming, and sweeping.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.