

You and your pacemaker



What is a pacemaker?

A pacemaker is a small device that helps keep your heart beating at a steady rate. It is made up of a long-lasting battery and an electronic circuit in a metal case that sits under your skin.

How does a pacemaker work?

When your heart is beating normally, the pacemaker will not be activated. It only activates when your heart rate is too slow.

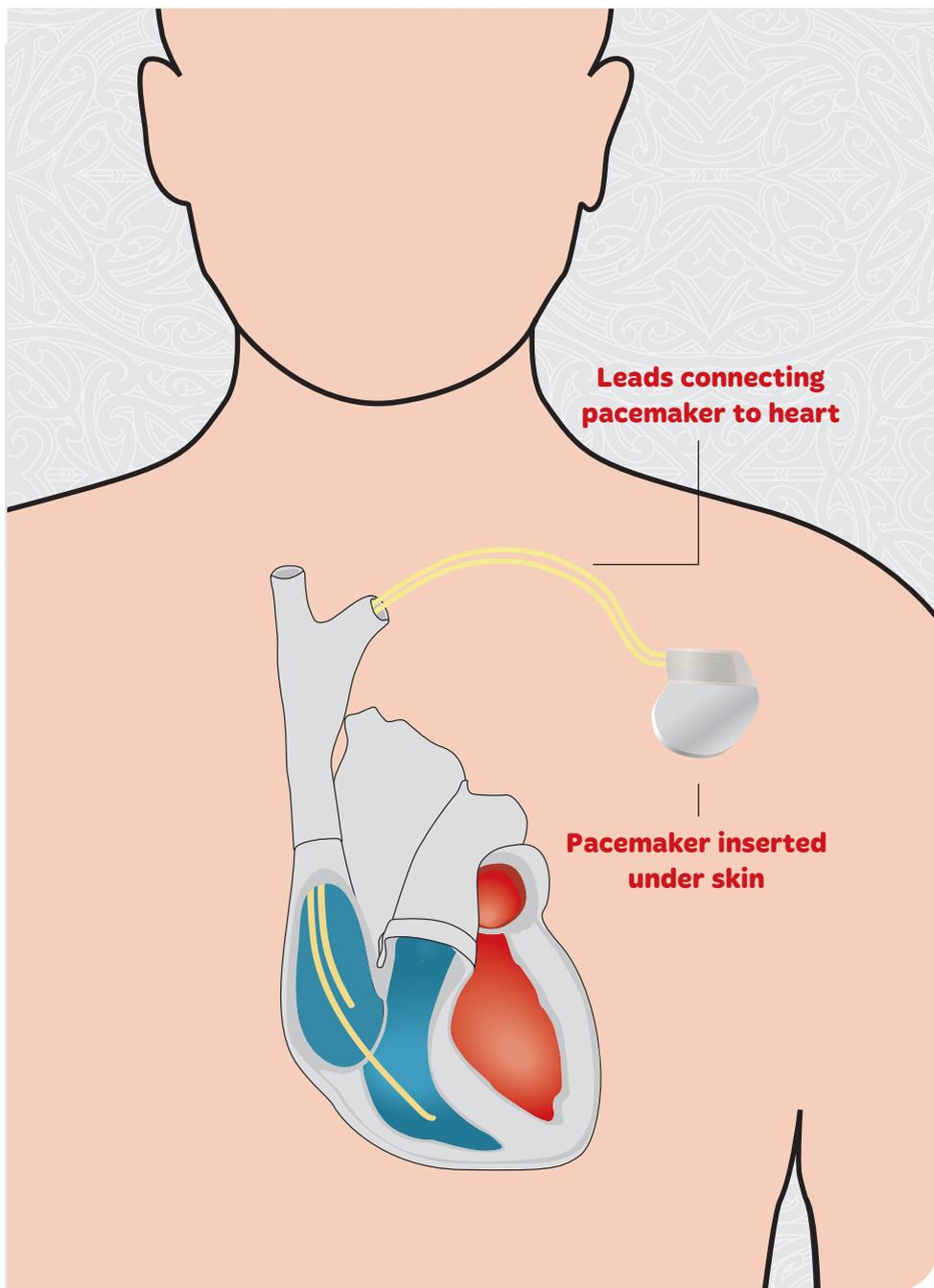
A pacemaker produces an electrical impulse, which is sent directly to the heart muscle by one or two leads. When the impulse reaches the heart muscle, it causes the heart to contract or beat.



How is a pacemaker put in?

This is done in hospital. You'll be awake, but you'll be given medication to help you relax. You will also get an injection to numb the area, so you shouldn't feel any pain. It usually takes about an hour.

You will be in hospital for a day or overnight. You'll need someone to drive you home.



Your pacemaker will be programmed according to your condition. Depending on your needs, you may have a lead going to the upper chamber, or the lower chamber, or a lead in both.

The first six weeks

You'll probably feel sore for the first few days after the pacemaker is inserted. It's important not to pick at the glue or stitches that have been used to close the skin.

Go straight to the doctor if:

- **you have symptoms like the ones you had before the pacemaker was put in**
- **you have hiccupping or twitching in your chest area**
- **you have a racing heart**
- **the wound gets red, swollen, hot, painful, or it leaks.**

It takes a few weeks for the pacemaker wires to become fully secure, so during that time avoid heavy lifting or lifting your arm high above your shoulder. Be careful when you wash your hair or get dressed. Remember to take your time and move your arm slowly. You may need help for some tasks, like:



**hanging out
the washing**



**reaching into
high cupboards**



**caring for children who
need to be picked up**

Avoid sport and exercise that involve arm movements, like swimming and golf. Cardiac rehabilitation classes and local cardiac support groups can help your recovery.



“Luckily, because of medical technology, my three teenage sons still have a mother. I do have a little box outlined in my chest to remind me every time I look in the mirror too!”

Rachel

Everyday life with your pacemaker

For most people a pacemaker doesn't interfere with everyday life. Many people feel safer knowing they have a pacemaker to help their heart if needed.

Work and leisure activities

Some people may need to make changes to their work or leisure activities. Discuss this with your specialist.

Driving

Most people can drive two weeks after the procedure, but check this with your doctor and insurance company.

Mobile phone

Keep your mobile phone and earbuds 15cm away from your pacemaker. Use the opposite ear and pocket.

Follow up clinic appointments

You'll have appointments every few months to check the pacemaker and the battery life. The battery can last up to seven years. You'll have a new battery fitted in hospital before the old one runs out.

ID card

You'll be given an identification card for your pacemaker. Carry this and a list of your medications at all times, especially for health-related appointments and when you're travelling. You may like to consider getting a Medic Alert bracelet.

Security scanners

Be prepared to show your ID card if you need to walk through a metal detector (for example at an airport). Make sure security staff don't hold the hand-held metal detector directly over your device. Walk quickly through full body scanners.

Other things to be aware of

Read the instructions that come with your pacemaker, they will tell you about what you should avoid.

Being too close to magnetic fields may affect or disable your pacemaker, so you'll need to avoid:

- **Magna-sleeps electric blankets**
- **CB radio equipment**
- **loudspeakers (must be 30cm away)**
- **magnetic bracelets**
- **electrolysis for hair removal**
- **electric arc welders**
- **high power radar or electrical installations in close range.**

For more information

To find out more visit heartfoundation.org.nz/pacemakers

To speak to a nurse about your condition, call our Heart Helpline **0800 863 375**.

As a charity we thank our generous donors for helping bring this resource to life.

heartfoundation.org.nz

The National Heart Foundation of New Zealand is a registered charity (CC23052) under the Charities Act 2005.

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