

ICD: Understanding Heart Rhythms

Maria had always been active, enjoying the outdoors at every opportunity... until she started having trouble breathing.

"I was trying to sleep, and I was lying on my back, and I literally couldn't breathe. I had to sit up, put my head on a TV tray on the sofa, on the couch, and literally sleep like that." – Maria, Patient

It turns out she had a heart condition. When working properly, the heart muscle continuously pumps blood, carrying oxygen and nutrients throughout the body.

The heart is divided into four chambers. When the heart beats, first the upper two chambers of the heart, called the atria, contract, releasing blood to the lower chambers, called ventricles.

Next, the ventricles contract, pushing blood out to the rest of the body. These contractions are controlled by electrical impulses that travel through the heart at what should be a steady rhythm.

But in some people the electrical impulses can become erratic, disrupting the heart's normal rhythm.

"Normally an individual has a heart rate between 60 and 80 beats per minute. At times it can speed up and if it's very fast heartbeat it could present a whole gamma of symptoms."

– Gabriel Breuer, MD Cardiac Electrophysiologist

A very fast beat in the heart's lower chambers known as ventricular tachycardia can lead to symptoms such as dizzy spells, fatigue, shortness of breath, and fainting.

"If you have an episode of sustained ventricular tachycardia that could be potentially life threatening."

Gabriel Breuer, MD Cardiac Electrophysiologist

For people like Maria, who are at risk ventricular tachycardia doctors often recommend an implantable cardioverter defibrillator or ICD. An ICD is designed to shock the heart back into a normal rhythm.

Maria's ICD provides her with peace of mind and the ability to once again do activities she enjoys.

"I am alive and living this wonderful life because I have this device right now. So, for me, it has been a life saver."

-Maria, Patient