

# Adjusting to Life with Your New Pacemaker

While the idea of living with a pacemaker might seem scary, Donald Williams knows his pacemaker is helping him to keep going.

*"Actually, I'm glad it's there. I don't have any more fainting spells."* – Donald, Patient

Your pacemaker works in the background 24 hours a day, monitoring your heart rhythms. If your heartbeat is abnormal, the pacemaker will deliver electrical impulses to your heart.

*"It keeps my heart at a steady beat of about between 60 and 70 beats per minute. Never felt any pain. Never felt any discomfort. And I don't feel it working, so it's not a distracting me at all."* – Donald, Patient

As Donald learned, living with a pacemaker requires following a few steps. For starters, always carry your ID card, which you'll receive after your device is implanted. The card has information about your particular pacemaker. You might also consider wearing a Medic alert bracelet.

*"It is important to tell all your healthcare providers that you have a device, even those who are not involved in your heart care."* - Gabriel Breuer, MD Cardiac Electrophysiologist

While most properly maintained consumer appliances such as microwave ovens and electronics pose little or no risk to your pacemaker, be aware of devices that can cause interference if not handled correctly.

Your cell phone, for example, should be kept away from the pacemaker. Talk on the phone using the ear opposite the device, and don't keep the phone in a shirt pocket over your pacemaker.

At airports, even though the walk-through and full-body scanners are considered safe, let a TSA agent know you have a pacemaker just in case you set off an alarm.

If you're someplace where security uses hand scanners, ask the guard to avoid placing the scanner near your chest any longer than necessary.

*"I'm going to check the rhythm of your heart..."*

Your healthcare provider will check your pacemaker on a regular basis to ensure it's working properly, make adjustments, if necessary, and check battery life.

Many patients, like Maria, are given a home monitor that wirelessly records information about the device and sends it to their health care provider.

*"I, literally, do not think about that machine, ever. They do the testing in the middle of the night, like three in*

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*the morning. So, it's in my bedroom for me. They do it on their own. I have no idea they're checking it."*

-Maria, Patient

The pulse generator, which contains the battery, needs to be replaced about every seven years but can sometimes last as long as 15. The lead wires, which run from the pulse generator to your heart, are not usually changed, but just tested to make sure they're working properly.

Beyond physical adjustments, you might experience some emotional difficulty at first. Some people are scared to exercise or engage in other activities they enjoy.

Discuss any concerns such as these with your healthcare provider. Talking to a counselor or joining a support group where you'll meet other people with cardiac implants can also be helpful.

*"Gives you a chance to tell your story, gives you a chance to vent. Gives you a chance to hear yourself say how afraid you are, how worried you are, and gives other folks a chance to tell you, "Well, I was worried, too." Or, "I was scared, too, but that was 15 years ago. I don't feel that anymore." – Donald, Patient*

It may take a little time adjusting to a pacemaker, but gradually you can return to an active, healthy life... as Maria has.

*"I know it's intimidating, it's a little scary. Just the scar's scary. Just embrace it. This is gonna give you opportunity to do things you like to do. It's gonna give you another lease on life." – Maria, Patient*