

Pacemaker Placement: Before Your Procedure

The heart has its own electrical system that helps keep it in rhythm and controls how fast it beats. Sometimes that system doesn't work right and a pacemaker can help.

A pacemaker is a small, battery-powered device that sends out painless electrical signals to make the heart muscle contract. Thin wires, called leads, carry the signal between the pacemaker and the heart.

There are different types of pacemakers. Some help the heart beat in a regular rhythm. Others help the heart pump more blood by making the lower chambers pump at the same time.

During the surgery you will be kept comfortable and safe by your anesthesia provider. You may get medicine that relaxes you or puts you in a light sleep. The area being worked on will be made numb with anesthetic.

The doctor will make a small cut—an incision—in your chest on the left or right side, just below your collarbone. Using an X-ray, your doctor can see how to move the leads to be sure they're put in the right place.

Your doctor connects the leads to the pacemaker, and it is placed under the skin of your chest. After the pacemaker is stitched into place and the leads are placed, the cut will be closed.

You may spend the night in the hospital. Before the procedure, tell your doctor about all the medicines and natural health products you take, especially blood thinners. Some can raise the risk of bleeding or cause problems with anesthesia. Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before your procedure.

Be sure to follow your doctor's directions for preparing for the procedure, including what you can eat or drink. Bring your photo ID, health insurance card, and any paperwork your hospital may have asked for.

Preparing to get a pacemaker may be stressful. But knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

And if you have any questions or concerns, you can always call your doctor.