How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

Contact Us
For all appointments and queries regarding your pacemaker for Wycombe and Stoke Mandeville Hospital, please call the number below:

01494 425471
(Monday – Friday 8am – 5pm) (excluding bank holidays)

Other helpful contact numbers:
Cardiac Day Unit 01494 425278 (Mon-Fri 7.30am – 6pm)
Wycombe Hospital 01494 526161
Stoke Mandeville Hospital 01296 315000 (switchboard)

Out of hours
In the event of you feeling unwell including a temperature, please contact your GP as soon as possible. If you require urgent help please seek Emergency Help.

Cardiac Physiology Patient information leaflet
If you require a translation or an alternative format of this leaflet please call PALS on 01296 316042
What is a Pacemaker?
A pacemaker is a small, electrical, metal device that connects to the heart by one or more leads. There can be one, two or three leads, depending on the type of device you have. Your doctor will tell you which pacemaker you will need. The pacemaker will monitor your own heart beat and work when needed. It sends an electrical signal along the lead to make the heart beat. The pacemaker is not designed to prevent or treat fast heart rates.

Pacemakers are permanent devices that require monitoring on a long-term basis. They do not lead to any significant lifestyle changes once implanted.

Why do I need a pacemaker?
It is likely that your doctor may have suggested that you need a pacemaker to help regulate your heart beat.

It is important to note that having a pacemaker is not a quick solution. It will not cure all health conditions but aims to help reduce some symptoms. Other unrelated health conditions should be brought to the attention of your GP or other appropriate Healthcare Professional.

How long will my Pacemaker last?
The pacemaker battery will roughly last around 6-10 years but this will depend on the frequency you use your pacemaker. The battery will be checked at every follow up appointment. As the battery life decreases, you will be placed on the pacemaker replacement list. You will be seen more regularly in clinic until the procedure. We will not let the battery completely run down before it is replaced. The pacemaker will function properly until it is changed, so you will not notice any difference. The replacement procedure is similar to the implant. Normally the same leads are used and the new pacemaker is connected to these.

Can I have an MRI scan?
It is important not to have an MRI scan without prior discussion with the pacemaker clinic team. Some pacemakers and leads are not compatible with MRI scanners. You will be able to have X-rays, ultrasound and CT scans.

What happens at airport security?
Show security your pacemaker ID card. You may not have to walk through the scanner. Scanners will not damage your pacemaker if you do. Security may choose to use the handheld scanner; this also will not harm the pacemaker.
Follow-up appointments
You will receive an appointment for a 6 week post implant check. This will be done at our pacing clinic at Wycombe Hospital. After this appointment it may be possible to be seen at our pacing clinic at Stoke Mandeville Hospital for following appointments if this is easier. You will be seen in our pacing clinic more regularly soon after the procedure within the first year, usually you will receive yearly appointments after this time.

At a pacemaker check appointment, you will meet a Cardiac Physiologist who will perform the check. There is no need for a doctor to be present. The wound site will be checked to make sure it is healing correctly. You may be asked questions about your general health and any medications you are currently taking. The check itself is painless. A special programmer is used to communicate with your pacemaker which gives information about how much you use your pacemaker and battery life. A few tests are performed on the leads. Very few people are aware of these tests being performed. The whole appointment takes roughly 20 minutes.

Are there any risks associated with the procedure?
No procedure is without risks. The doctor will go through these with you before the procedure. Complications can include infection, bruising and bleeding. There is a small risk that a pacemaker lead may move out of position after the procedure. This may require adjustment with a further procedure. Fortunately, the risks of complications are low.

Pre-Procedural
You will receive a letter inviting you for your pacemaker implant. It is important to follow the instructions on this letter prior the procedure.

Please phone the booking coordinator on 01494 425902 with any concerns or questions as soon as possible after receiving the letter.

You are required to wash the day before or morning of the procedure. The wound will need to be kept clean and dry for 48 hours.
What happens during the procedure?
The procedure is carried out under local anaesthetic, as there is no need for general anaesthetic. A small incision is made into a large vein just under your collar bone. The leads are fed down this vein to your heart with the aid of X-ray. These leads will be tested during the procedure to check they work and their position. The leads are then connected to the pacemaker which sits under the skin.

The whole procedure takes roughly an hour but can vary. You may receive absorbable stitches or non-absorbable stitches which will need to be removed after 7-10 days. You will be advised about care of your wound after your procedure. Please make an appointment with your GP Practice Nurse.

Post-Procedure
A dressing will be placed over the wound. This can be removed after 48 hours. Please look for any signs of redness, swelling or discharge from the wound. Please keep the area clean and dry.

Before going home, you may receive a chest X-ray to check the position of the pacemaker and leads.

A Cardiac Physiologist will check your pacemaker is working properly before giving you an ID card. This card contains information about you and your pacemaker. It is important to carry this card with you at all times. It is useful to photocopy the card and give a copy to a family member. Within the first few weeks of having the pacemaker, try to avoid excessive arm movements on the side the pacemaker is fitted.

Do not lift the arm above shoulder level or carry excessive weight on that arm as this may cause the leads to move.

Can I drive?
You will need to inform the DVLA that you have a pacemaker. In accordance with the DVLA guidelines you will not be able to drive for:
• Group 1 (Car/Motorcycles) – One week post procedure
• Group 2 (HGV/PCV) – Six weeks post procedure

Driving may resume after this period, provided there is no other disqualifying condition. If you have been told not to drive for other health reasons, please seek advice from a doctor, who can advise further.

For further information please contact the DVLA.