Temporary Pacemakers

A pacemaker is an electronic device that helps your heart beat regularly. Temporary pacemakers are for short term heart problems, such as a change in heart rate from open heart surgery, heart attack, medicine problems, infection, or other cardiovascular problems. They may be used until your heart problems improve. If they do not improve, a permanent pacemaker is placed.

Pacemakers are able to:

- Speed up the heart rate when it is too slow, called bradycardia
- Slow down the heart rate if it is too fast, called tachycardia
- Help it beat regularly, if it is irregular.

How a pacemaker works

- Your heart has its own natural pacemaker. Normally, it releases a small electrical impulse that causes your heart muscle to contract and pump blood. Sometimes your heart may not start that natural impulse or there may be irregular impulses. This is when a pacemaker is needed.

- The temporary pacemaker starts an impulse from the battery in the pacemaker box down a wire to the heart muscle.

- The pacemaker reads your heart rate and rhythm. It puts out impulses at a regular rate if your heart does not beat on its own.
How the pacemaker is placed

- The pace maker is placed in open heart surgery or in the electrophysiology laboratory (EP lab):

  - In open heart surgery, the wire comes out through the skin next to the incision and attaches to the pacemaker box.

  - In the EP lab, the pacemaker wire is put in through a large vein in your neck or near your collarbone.

- Skin is cleaned with special soap at the insertion site. Medicine is given to numb the area near the vein for placement. Using x-rays as a guide, a doctor places a needle into the vein that will thread the pacemaker wire to the heart. Once the wire is placed, the needle is slowly removed. The lead wire is then attached to the pacemaker box. A dressing covers the spot where the wire comes out of your skin.
**Pacemaker Safety**

To keep you safe with the pacemaker:

- Use the pouch to hold it around your neck or keep the clips secured to your hospital gown. **Do not pull on the wires or dials on the pacemaker box.**

- **Do not take showers.** The pacemaker box and wires must be kept dry. Use sponge baths for cleaning.

- To prevent falls, always ask staff for help getting in and out of bed or when going to the bathroom.

- Use a battery-operated shaver or safety shaver and avoid using a hair dryer.

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Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: **health-info@osu.edu.**