

You and your ICD



What is an ICD?

An ICD (implantable cardioverter defibrillator) is a small device that sits under your skin. It can detect and correct dangerous heart rhythms by giving a shock that resets the heart to a normal rhythm.

ICDs have 2 main parts:

- a pulse generator: an electronic circuit and long-lasting battery in a metal case
- one or more leads (thin wires).



You may need an ICD if you've had a cardiac arrest or you're at risk of having one.

How is an ICD fitted?

You'll have your ICD fitted in hospital. You'll be awake, but will get medication to make you sleepy. Most people will stay in hospital overnight. You will need someone to drive you home.



Scan the QR code for detailed information about the procedure.

How an ICD works

Your ICD monitors your heart rhythm all the time.

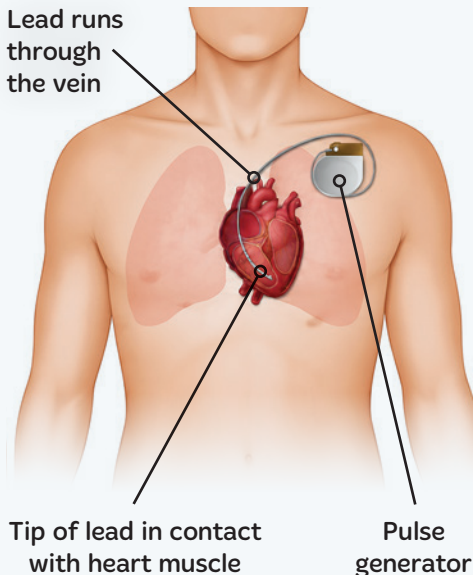
If it detects an unusual rhythm, it sends a small electrical signal to your heart to correct the rhythm. This is **pacing**.

If it detects a very fast or chaotic rhythm, it gives an electric shock to reset your heart rhythm. This is **defibrillation**.

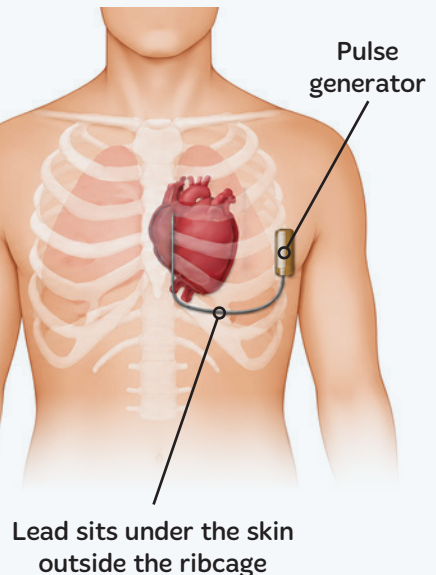
With transvenous ICDs, the pulse generator sits under the skin on your chest. The leads attach to the heart through the vein. They can pace and defibrillate.

Subcutaneous ICDs (S-ICDs) sit under the skin outside your ribcage, with a single lead under the skin. They defibrillate but don't pace.

Transvenous ICD



Subcutaneous ICD



After the procedure

You might feel sore or have bruising for a few days. Your cardiology team will tell you which medications are safe for you to take if you have pain or discomfort. Serious problems are rare.

Call your healthcare professional straight away if you notice:

- symptoms like the ones you had before getting an ICD
- hiccups or twitching in your chest
- your heart feels like it's racing
- your wound becomes red, swollen, hot, painful or leaks (this could mean an infection).

Caring for your wound

- Keep your wound dry for 5 to 7 days.
- Don't use plasters, creams or talcum powder on the wound.
- Avoid touching the wound. It's important not to pick at the glue or stitches so your skin can heal.

Getting back to work

Most people can return to work a few weeks after getting an ICD. Talk to your doctor about when to return to work if your job involves heavy physical labour, lifting, working with strong magnetic fields or driving large vehicles.



While you're healing

Avoid



Raising your arm above your shoulder, heavy lifting and activities that use arm movements, such as golf.

Get help with



Everyday tasks like hanging out the washing, reaching into high cupboards, washing your hair or getting dressed.

It takes a few weeks for the ICD leads to become secure. If you notice any problems with your ICD, call your cardiac device clinic right away.

Driving

NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi advises these stand-down periods for people with ICDs.

You will need specialist approval to drive again, and for vehicles other than a private car or motorbike.

Getting an ICD after a heart event	6 months
After a shock from your ICD	6 months
After ICD batteries are changed	4 weeks
Getting an ICD but not had a heart event	At least 2 weeks



Life with an ICD

For most people, an ICD doesn't interfere with everyday life. You'll be given an identification card (ID) for your ICD. Always carry this card and a list of your medications.

You will have regular appointments at your cardiac device clinic. How often will depend on your condition and the ICD.

When your ICD gives a shock

An ICD shock feels like a thump or a kick in your chest or back. Some people feel dizzy, have a racing heart or collapse before a shock.

Rest for a while after a shock. Go to your nearest emergency department if you continue to feel unwell.

If you feel OK, contact your cardiac device clinic. They will check that your heart health is stable.

Medical procedures and MRI scans

Mention your ICD before any medical procedure or treatment. Your ICD may need to be checked before and after. Most ICDs are safe for MRIs but will need special programming.

Mobile phones

Use the ear on the opposite side to the ICD (usually the right ear). Don't put mobile phones, earbuds or earphones in a chest pocket. Don't wear earphones around your neck.

Electronics

Most everyday electronic devices are safe with ICDs. Some larger devices can send out strong electrical signals. If you're unsure if a device is safe, ask your cardiac device clinic.

Travelling with an ICD

Take your ID card and tell security staff before going through a scanner. Ask them not to hold hand-held metal detectors over your chest.

If you have remote monitoring, tell the clinic if you're away for more than 3 weeks.

Physical activity with an ICD

You can return to physical activity, including sex, after you have clearance from the cardiac device clinic.

Being active is great for your heart and helps with recovery. Focus on low-impact exercises like walking and gentle cycling for the first 6 weeks. Then gradually increase how long and hard you exercise. Talk to your doctor about what's right for you.



Important: If you feel chest pain, dizziness or shortness of breath while exercising, stop right away and speak to your doctor or nurse.



You have
the power to
improve your
heart health



After the procedure:

- ☐ I know how to care for my wound and the symptoms to watch for
- ☐ I know what movements and activities to avoid
- ☐ I know I can't drive until signed off by a specialist
- ☐ I've talked to the doctor about returning to work
- ☐ I know how to return to exercise safely
- ☐ I have my ID card
- ☐ I know to avoid putting my mobile phone, earbuds or earphones in my chest pocket
- ☐ I know to mention my ICD before any medical procedure

Looking for support?

Visit heartfoundation.org.nz, scan the QR code
or call our Heart Line on 0800 863 375.

