Pacemaker Battery Change

A pacemaker battery usually lasts 4 to12 years. Once or twice per year, you will be asked to visit your caregiver to have a full evaluation of your pacemaker. When a battery needs to be replaced, the entire pacemaker is actually replaced so that you can benefit from new circuitry and any new features that have recently been added to pacemakers. Most often, this procedure is very simple because the leads are already in place. After giving medicine to numb the skin, your health care provider makes a cut to reopen the pocket holding the pacemaker and disconnects the old device from its leads. The leads are routinely tested at this time. If they are working okay, the new pacemaker may simply be connected to the existing leads. If there is any problem with the old lead system, it may be wise to replace the lead system while inserting the new pacemaker.

There are many things that affect how long a pacemaker battery will last:

- Age of the pacemaker.
- Number of leads (1, 2 or 3).
- Pacemaker work load. If the pacemaker is helping the heart more often, then the battery will not last as long as if the pacemaker does not need to help the heart.
- Resistance of the leads. The greater the resistance, the greater the drain on the battery. This can increase as the leads get older or if one or more of the leads does not have the best contact with the heart.
- Power (*voltage*) settings.
- The health of the person's heart. If the health of the heart gets worse, then the pacemaker may have to work more often and the setting changed to accommodate these changes.

Your health care provider will be alerted to the fact that it is time to replace the battery during follow-up exams. He or she will check your pacemaker using a small table-top computer, called a programmer, and a wand. The wand is about the same size as a remote control. Your provider puts the wand on your body in the area where the pacemaker is located. Information from the pacemaker is received about how well your heart is working and the status of the battery. It is not painful, and it usually takes just a few minutes. You will have plenty of time before the battery is fully used up to plan for replacement.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

Wash all of the skin around the area of the chest where the pacemaker is located. Try to remove any loose, scaling skin. Unless advised otherwise, avoid using aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen for 3-4 days before the procedure. Ask your caregiver for help with any other medication adjustments before the pacemaker is replaced. Unless advised otherwise, do not eat or drink after midnight on the night before the procedure EXCEPT for drinking water and taking your medications as you normally would.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT:

- Symptoms of chest pain, trouble breathing, palpitations, lightheadedness, or feelings of an abnormal or irregular heart beat.
- Allergies.
- Medications taken including herbs, eye drops, over the counter medications, and creams
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams).
- Possible pregnancy, if applicable.
- Previous problems with anesthetics or Novocaine.
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*).
- History of bleeding or blood problems.
- Surgery since your last pacemaker placement.
- Other health problems.

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

These are very uncommon but include:

- Bleeding.

- Bruising of the skin around where the incision was made.
- Pain at the site of the incision.
- Pulling apart of the skin at the incision site.
- Infection.
- Allergic reaction to anesthetics or medicines used during the procedure.

Diabetics may have a temporary increase in their blood sugar after any surgical procedure.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

- A heart monitor and the pacemaker programmer will be used to make sure that the new pacemaker is working properly.
- You can go home after the procedure.
- Your caregiver will advise you if you need to have any stitches. They will be removed 5-7 days after the procedure.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Keep the incision clean and dry.
- Unless advised otherwise, you may shower after carefully covering the incision with plastic wrap that is taped to your chest.
- For the first week after the replacement, avoid stretching motions that pull at the incision site and avoid heavy exercise with the arm on the same side as the incision.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Your caregiver will tell you when you will need to next test your pacemaker by telephone or when to return to the office for re-exam and/or removal of stitches, if necessary.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have unusual pain at the incision site that is not adequately helped by over-the-counter or prescription medicine.
- There is drainage or pus from the incision site.
- You develop red streaking that extends above or below the incision site.
- You feel brief intermittent palpitations, lightheadedness or any symptoms that you feel might be related to your heart.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You experience chest pain that is different than the pain at the incision site.
- You experience:
  - Shortness of breath.
  - Palpitations.
  - Irregular heart beat.
  - Lightheadedness that does not go away quickly.
  - Fainting.
- You develop a fever.
- You have pain that gets worse even though you are taking pain medicine.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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