

Additional Notes

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Deactivating your Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD)

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital,
Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW

Author: **Gaynor Richards** Date: **December 2021** Version: **Four**
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t: 01202 303626 w: www.uhd.nhs.uk

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This booklet is for people who have an ICD and the support available for their families and carers.

What is an ICD?

An ICD is an implantable device which contains a battery powered electronic circuit. It is connected to the heart with one or more leads. It is constantly monitoring the heart rate and rhythm. If the heart rate goes too fast in the ventricles, the ICD can either pace faster than the abnormal rhythm (anti-tachycardia pacing) or if necessary, deliver a shock to the heart to restore a normal heart rhythm. It can also function as a pacemaker and pace the heart if it beats too slowly.

A Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy Defibrillator (CRT-D) paces both the lower chambers of the heart to synchronise the heart's contractions and reduce symptoms associated with heart failure. The pacing function of the ICD can be programmed independently from itself. Any programming changes can be done during an ICD check.

What is ICD deactivation?

Deactivation involves "switching off" the treatment for life threatening heart rhythm disturbances so it is no longer able to deliver anti-tachycardia pacing or shock therapy to restore a normal heart rhythm.

Deactivation does NOT disable the pacemaker or resynchronisation function of the ICD.

Further support and advice

If you or your family would like to speak to someone about ICD deactivation please contact the arrhythmia nurses on **0300 019 6154** or email them at **arrhythmia.nurses@uhd.nhs.uk** anytime between 8am-6pm Monday to Friday.

Please leave a message as the answerphone is checked frequently for messages and your call will be returned as soon as possible.

The above number should only be used for general enquiries.

If you have an unrelated medical concern please contact your GP.

In the event of an emergency please dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.

Who will make the decision to deactivate the ICD?

The decision to deactivate your ICD will usually be made by you. Any decision you do make will be supported by the team involved in your care.

It is important that you consider deactivation and discuss your wishes while you are able to make such choices. This will ensure that your family and those involved in your care know and understand your wishes. If your health deteriorates in such a way that you are not able to make a decision about your care, the medical team will have to make decisions for you. Any decision about your care will be made in your best interests and take into account the views of your relatives/significant others. Therefore, discussing your preferences and wishes in advance will ensure that any decisions made for you are what you would have wanted.

Deactivation of an ICD is reversible. Therefore, if you change your mind or your health improves, the ICD function can be switched back on to provide treatment for life threatening heart rhythms.

How is an ICD deactivated?

There are two ways of deactivating the treatment for life threatening heart rhythms:

- 1 Once a decision has been made about deactivation, it will be done by at the earliest opportunity by a Cardiac Physiologist using a programmer similar to the one used in the clinic for your routine checks. The programmer is placed over the site of your ICD. It is painless and only takes a few minutes. You will not feel any different when it is done.
- 2 If it is not possible to arrange for your ICD to be deactivated immediately using a programmer, it can be deactivated with a magnet. The magnet will be placed on your skin directly over the ICD and secured with tape. A magnet is only used temporarily and your ICD will be deactivated with a programmer as soon as this can be arranged.

Where will the ICD be deactivated?

The ICD can be deactivated in the ICD clinic where you would normally have your ICD check. If you are too unwell to attend clinic, the cardiac physiologist, often accompanied by an arrhythmia nurse specialist, will arrange to see you in your home.

Following ICD deactivation with the programmer, you will still continue to have remote follow up to monitor the pacemaker function of the ICD and the battery longevity.

Who should I discuss it with?

It is best to talk about deactivation when you are well, so that the people who care about you understand what the decision involves, the reasons for considering it and the reasons for the decision you make. You may wish to discuss this with your:

- family, partner or carers
- cardiologist of heart failure consultant
- cardiac physiologist or arrhythmia nurse specialist
- general practitioner
- palliative care consultant, if you have one

These people may be able to help you reach a decision you are comfortable with.

Summary

- ICD deactivation is painless and similar to having an ICD check
- The ICD will no longer provide treatment for life threatening heart rhythms once deactivated.
- Deactivation will not cause death but in time allows a natural death.
- The pacemaker function of the device remains unchanged and will continue to work if your heart beats too slowly or for resynchronisation therapy for heart failure.
- Deactivation of the ICD is reversible if your situation changes or you change your mind.

Why would an ICD be deactivated?

In the future you may decide that you no longer wish to receive treatment from the ICD for potentially life threatening heart rhythms. This may be because there has been a deterioration in your health such as the progression of heart failure or the development of a new condition such as cancer. In such instances you may wish to focus on care that makes you as comfortable as possible rather than on treatment to prolong your life.

If you are nearing the end of your life there is a risk of having a shock from your ICD which would be distressing for both you and your family. If you do become unwell you may feel that the burden of the ICD outweighs its benefit and you may no longer wish to receive treatment from the device.

How is the ICD deactivated?

Once a decision has been made about deactivation, it will be done by at the earliest opportunity by a cardiac physiologist. This may not be the same day as the decision. Deactivation involves placing a programmer over the ICD site. It is painless and similar to when you have an ICD check. It only takes a few minutes and you will not feel any different when it is done.

Deactivation of an ICD is reversible. Therefore, if you change your mind or your health improves the ICD function can be switched back on to provide treatment for life threatening heart rhythms.