



AICD – Automated Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator

What is an AICD?

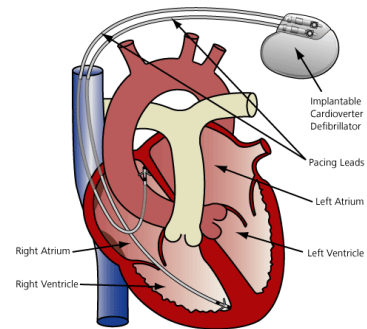
An AICD is a device implanted in your chest to deliver an electric current to correct an abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia) to a normal heart rhythm.

Why do I need one?

Some people have abnormal rapid heart rhythms. These abnormal rapid heart beats can interrupt the hearts pumping action and cause a decrease in the amount of blood being pumped with each heart beat or cause no blood to be pumped at all (a cardiac arrest). This can make you unwell, can cause discomfort or can sometimes be life threatening. An AICD is a safety net against these fast heart rhythms and cardiac arrest.

What will the AICD do?

The AICD will constantly monitor your heart, watching for any signs of an abnormal heart rhythm. All AICDs detect an abnormal fast heart beat (tachyarrhythmia), and some AICDs can also detect if your heart beats too slow and misses beats (bradycardia) and can add in extra beats (just like a pacemaker). Your doctor will choose the one best suited to the type of abnormal heart rhythm you are suffering from. When your heart beats abnormally fast the AICD will detect this and deliver a small electric current. This electric current will stop all abnormal heart activity and allow the hearts natural pacemaker (the sinoatrial node) to take over and restore the heart to a normal rhythm. If it doesn't achieve this on the first go, it will deliver a series of currents increasing in intensity until the heart returns to normal. The AICD has a memory store and the doctors are able to retrieve information about your heart rhythm at follow up visits using a special computer that "talks" to your AICD from the outside.



What will it feel like when it delivers an electric current?

The sensation you feel will depend on the type of abnormal heart rhythm and what kind of therapy the AICD delivers. If you are having a slow heart beat you will be unaware of the activity of the AICD acting as a pacemaker. People who have abnormally fast heart beats describe the sensation as a thump inside their chest with some mild discomfort. If your heart goes into a life threatening rhythm it can be like a kick in the chest which is startling but passes very quickly. Remembering the device can be lifesaving can help decrease the stress and shock when a treatment is delivered by your AICD. Some people find it reassuring to know their AICD is always ready to do its job. It should not cause disruption to your everyday life or activities.

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How do they put in the AICD?

The AICD will usually be inserted under the skin or in your upper chest muscles with a small operation. You will have a small scar about 4 or 5 cm long. For around 2 weeks after the operation you will be a little bit sore and need to take care of the wound and watch for any redness or drainage that might indicate an infection. For this 2 weeks it is best not to lift anything heavy with your arm on the side it was inserted and try not to lift the arm above shoulder height, this prevents strain on the wound. During this time do some gentle shoulder exercises, like shrugging and rolling to prevent any stiffness. At the time of insertion of your AICD you will be given a booklet with everything you need to know about your new AICD.

For further information contact the Cardiac Educator at Healthy Living NT.

References:

1. Medtronic Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator with Atrial and Ventricular Therapies, Restoring the Rhythms of Life; Medtronic, Inc. 2001.
2. St. Jude medical website www.sjm.com