



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Deactivating an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)

Information for patients,
relatives and carers

This leaflet explains why deactivating an implantable cardioverter defibrillator may be considered and how this is done.

What is an implantable cardioverter defibrillator?

An implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) is a device that can apply an electrical shock across the heart if a dangerous heart rhythm is detected. ICDs take different forms and may be combined with pacemakers (cardiac resynchronisation therapy defibrillator, CRTD) or operate as an ICD alone.

You may have had your ICD device for many years, and may or may not have received a shock from your device. You will have been told when you had your device inserted that it is powered by small batteries that need replacing when they run out. The life of these batteries are routinely reviewed at your cardiology device checks. Every time a battery is replaced, there is an increased risk of complications from the procedure, particularly the risk of infection.

Why would someone consider deactivating an ICD?

As we age, we need to consider whether previous treatments, be that drugs or devices, are still in your best interest. The medical team may discuss with you and/or your loved ones, whether a procedure to replace the battery is still recommended, as well as whether there has been a change in your condition, which means a defibrillator is no longer appropriate.

Alongside the benefit of life-saving shocks, there is also the risk of inappropriate shocks. This is when the device delivers a shock (which can be painful) when it is not required.

For these reasons, some people may decide they no longer wish to have a functioning defibrillator.

In patients who are nearing the end of their life, shocks may prevent a natural death and can also be painful and distressing. As our health changes, many people wish to avoid such medical interventions, to allow the focus to be on a more dignified and natural death.

What happens when an ICD is deactivated?

ICD deactivation is done in a similar way to the device checks you will have had in the cardiology department. A programming device is placed over the ICD and the specialist healthcare professional changes the settings via a computer. It is non-invasive and quick. You will not feel any physical difference after deactivation.

ICD deactivations can be done in the community and do not require a hospital appointment, which is more convenient if you are not able to come into hospital easily.

The ICD function of a device can be turned off without affecting other functions of the device – for example, if the device also works as a pacemaker.

What happens if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, the ICD function of a device can be reactivated. However, for the device to work, the battery would need to have enough charge remaining.

Who do I speak to if I would like to consider having an ICD deactivated, or I have questions?

You are welcome to speak in more detail about this to your doctor, specialist nurse, palliative care team or cardiac physiologist at your next device check appointment in the cardiology department.

Contacting us

Cardiac Devices Clinic

Tel no: 0118 322 6636 (clinical advice & guidance)

Monday to Friday (8-6pm)

CAT 11 Admin Team (Cardiology)

Tel no: 0118 322 6676 (appointments)

Monday to Friday (9am-5pm) or email: rbtr.CAT11@nhs.net

Hospital Palliative Care Team

Tel no: 0118 322 7826

Available 8am-4pm 7 days a week or email:

rbtr.palliativecare@nhs.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us on 0118 322 6676 or email rbtr.CAT11@nhs.net

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