What to Ask Your Doctor Before Getting a Pacemaker for AFib

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Preparing for a Pacemaker

A number of treatment options are now available to better manage atrial fibrillation. If you suffer from this condition, you may want to explore the possibility of getting a pacemaker for Afib. Let's look at benefits and potential risks of this treatment option. This way, you can talk to your doctor and ask some questions to help you understand whether or not this therapy is suitable for you.

How a Pacemaker Works

Your heart has a "conduction system", its own electrical system that sends signals which ensure optimal rate and rhythm. In A Fib the conduction system is affected and therefore electronic devices such as artificial pacemakers are used to stimulate the heart and help restore the normal rhythm. The pacemaker is implanted under the skin just below your clavicle, and this procedure is done under local anesthesia or local anesthesia in the hospital.

Doctors have specific guidelines in regards to using these pacemakers. Depending on your health condition(s), pacemakers can:

1. Be beneficial, useful and effective
2. Have some success
3. Be detrimental to your health

Questions to Ask

Therefore the first question you should ask your doctor is whether or not a pacemaker is beneficial for you and what would be the advantage of pacemaker over medications or other therapeutic options.

Secondly you have to ask whether or not you will have local or general anesthesia and the risk for side effects from this procedure (including less common but possible serious adverse reactions such as collapsed lung, infections or bleeding)

Another question to ask your doctor is about the type of pacemaker you will receive - currently there are few options – demand pacemakers (which monitor your natural activity of the heart and work only when the heart's rate is to slow or skips a beat), fixed rate pacemakers (that discharge impulses at regular rate regardless of the heart's own electrical activity) and rate-responsive pacemakers (that increase or decrease the heart rate to help your heart adapt to different activities- like during exercise or rest). Each of these types of pacemakers has their own benefits and limitations, and you should be aware of them.

Aftercare

Once you have a pacemaker you will need to have regular follow up appointments with the doctor, to make sure it

works properly. Ask your healthcare provider how often, and how long will be these appointments, to organize your schedule accordingly. In some cases the activity of pacemaker can be monitored via telephone (using a telephone transmitting device) rather than going to the medical office.

Since artificial pacemakers use electromagnetic energy, you need to use caution in special situations- talk to your doctor and ask which devices you shouldn’t use, and have a list with all those devices that are safe, possibly safe or not safe to be around. Generally speaking, the new pacemakers are safer than the older ones and you can use safely household appliances such as microwaves, TVs, radio or electric blankets. While the older pacemakers did occasionally interfere with cell phones, the new ones appear to not interact with mobile phones, media players or wireless modems. Some medical procedures such as MRIs also can interfere with your pacemaker.