



## **Deactivating (turning off) the defibrillator function of your pacemaker**

ICD stands for implantable cardioverter defibrillator. It is slightly larger than a small matchbox and is connected to your heart by one or more leads. The ICD, which contains a battery and electronic circuit, is usually implanted under the skin in your upper chest, with the leads passed along a blood vessel to your heart.

As well as monitoring your heart, the ICD can deliver stimulation if required to change its rhythm – perhaps because it is too slow or too fast.

If required, the ICD can also produce bigger shocks to stop a dangerous heart rhythm.

Deciding whether to turn off you're the defibrillation function of your ICD is not simple, but depends on the needs and wishes of both you and your family. It may be helpful to consider the following when discussing your options:

Has your doctor/nurse indicated that you may be nearing the end of your natural life?

Has your quality of life deteriorated in a way that you no longer want the ICD to deliver a shock in the event of an irregular heart rhythm?

Have you reached a point where dying suddenly from a change in heart rhythm might be seen as a good a way as any for your life to end?

Would it be better to avoid the risk of being shocked repeatedly without meaningful or long-term prolongation of your life?

It is important that you understand a few important aspects about turning off or re-programming your defibrillator:

The ICD defibrillator can be turned off without affecting its other functions, which would continue to provide support for a slow or poorly- functioning heartbeat.

Turning it off would not be painful. It is turned off using the same device used to talk to your ICD when you have your routine checks.

Turning off the defibrillator would not cause you to die and is not suicide. It simply means that, when symptoms of a terminal illness cannot be managed any longer, you can allow nature to take its course.

These are clearly big decisions that cannot be hurried. You may therefore find it helpful to discuss your thoughts and concerns with:

Your partner/family/carer

Your GP/consultant

Your nurse

The cardio-respiratory team (ICD clinic)

If you decide to have the defibrillator function of your ICD turned off, your GP or consultant will ask you to sign a consent form. This will be sent to the cardio-respiratory department to request deactivation.

If you are already a patient in the hospital, deactivation can usually be completed the same day.

If you are at home, the cardio-respiratory department will contact you to arrange an appointment at North Devon District Hospital. This can usually be arranged within a few days.

Arrhythmia Care Coordinator – 01271 311633

Heart Failure Team – Nurse Specialists 01271 311633

Cardiac Physiologist – 01271 322745

British Heart Foundation – Telephone: 020 7936 0185  
Website: