WOUND CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PACEMAKER AND DEFIBRILLATOR PATIENTS

After discharge, most of the care of your pacemaker or defibrillator site will be common sense. These are some general instructions and points of information relating to the postoperative period.

1. WOUND CARE:
   - The dressing that was applied at the time of the procedure should be left in place for two days. During this period of time, you should not get the wound or dressing wet.
   - After two days, the outer dressing should be removed and the area cleaned daily with a mild antibacterial soap, such as Dial.
   - Your wound may have been closed with either stitches or staples. If you have stitches, they are under the skin and dissolve. If you have staples, they will be removed in the office at your first follow-up visit.
   - If you have dissolving stitches; when the outer dressing is removed, you will notice that there are Steri-Strips (small pieces of tape) over the incision. These help protect the wound, and typically after 7-14 days of daily cleaning, they will begin to wear off. Let them begin to wear off on their own. It is best to remove them when they start to curl up as the incision is being cleaned with soap and water.
   - Although it is not necessary, it is perfectly acceptable to put Polysporin or bacitracin ointment over the wound for the first two weeks.
   - Try not to rub or scratch the area. Itching is a normal part of the healing process.
   - Avoid submerging the wound in a bathtub, swimming pool, or Jacuzzi for at least three to four weeks, until the incision has completely closed.
   - Although, it is not absolutely essential to cover the incision after the first 48 hours, you may find it preferable to keep it covered with a 4 x 4 gauze with some light paper tape to minimize any normal drainage from staining your clothing and to protect the wound from irritation from bra straps, clothing, and seat belts.
   - The shoulder straps of seat belts may be a problem for the first few weeks, and if local padding over the wound does not protect it, then you may have to not use the shoulder portion of the seat belt for the first few weeks.
   - If you are given antibiotics as a preventive measure after the procedure, they can usually be stopped 3 evenings after the pacemaker is inserted.

2. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:
   - Most defibrillators or pacemakers are placed in the left or right upper chest, and it is important to maintain range of motion of your arm and shoulder. Although, it may be uncomfortable to move the arm, full range of motion should be done on a daily basis, but once again common sense should be used. For approximately the first two weeks, you should not lift more than 5-10 pounds, and although, it is perfectly fine to wash your hair, you should not raise the arm on a repetitive basis. After two weeks, most activities can be resumed, although from two to four weeks, extreme physical activity such as playing golf, bowling, or lifting weights should be avoided. After four weeks, almost all activities can be resumed on a normal basis, although there will still be some intermittent discomfort over the area.
   - Unless there was a period of unconsciousness or blackout that led to the implantation of the device, driving can be resumed once you are no longer taking pain medications, other than aspirin or Tylenol, and local discomfort in the incision has decreased. This is typically 7-10 days.

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If you had a blackout or a period of unconsciousness or a cardiac arrest preceding the implant of your device, Arizona Law states that you should not operate a motor vehicle for at least three months.

3. **SIGNS OF INFECTION OR WOUND-RELATED PROBLEMS:**
   - It is normal to develop some redness along the incision line and have some generalized swelling over the device.
   - Bruising around the area and sometimes through the upper chest and shoulder is also not uncommon, particularly if you are taking aspirin, Plavix, or Coumadin.
   - Most infections typically do not to declare themselves until between two and four weeks after the device is implanted. You would typically notice, at that point, that there will be an increasing amount of swelling, worsening pain over the incision, redness that spreads away from the incision, or warmth to touch that was not present earlier in the postoperative course. A fever is unusual unless the infection has become significant.
   - It is fairly normal to have bloody drainage from the incision for few days after the outer dressing is removed. Drainage beyond this point, drainage that becomes yellow or pus-like, and the wound opening and draining, would all be of some concern, and we should be contacted immediately.

4. **OTHER POINTS:**
   - Antibiotic prophylaxis for dental work is not necessary, just because you have a pacemaker or defibrillator.
   - The booklet that accompanies your device will explain what to do about exposure to strong electrical or magnetic fields that might affect the function of your device. Fortunately, with the few exceptions, these are not commonly encountered in everyday life. You should not have an MRI, but other x-rays or CT scans are perfectly acceptable.
   - If you are going to have elective surgery that will require the use of electrocautery, let your surgeon know that you have a device. The location and type of surgery may influence if any precautions need to be taken with respect to the device. Your surgeon may request formal clearance on what to do with respect to the device. The greatest potential for issues is if the surgery is in close proximity to the generator.
   - You were given a temporary wallet ID card and you should receive a permanent card in roughly six weeks from the manufacturer. The purpose of this card is to list the manufacturer and model numbers of the leads and generators.
   - Normal routine follow-up is approximately 10 days to three weeks after the implant, and you would have been informed at the time of discharge if you should be seen sooner for other reasons.
   - If there are any questions or concerns regarding the above issues or any other aspects of your pacemaker or defibrillator, please contact our office at 602-386-1100.
   - Metal detectors at airports or elsewhere, in general, are not a serious problem. Follow their instructions. Do not be overly concerned if they insist you walk through the detector. These magnetic fields change the operation of the device only for the period of time they are next to the device (usually just 1-2 seconds) and then the device immediately resumes its normal function. The hand-held wand might be a problem but only if it was left next to your device for more than 10-20 seconds.

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