

# Guide to Cardioversion of Atrial Fibrillation

Electrical cardioversion of atrial fibrillation is a procedure used to restore normal rhythm to a heart that is beating irregularly. Cardioversion is typically an outpatient procedure.

## Before the Procedure

- We will be in contact with your primary physician to confirm that you have been given adequate doses of blood thinner for at least three weeks prior to the cardioversion. If you have been in atrial fibrillation for less than 48 hours this may not apply to you.
- Before the procedure, some patients – including those who have not had three weeks of adequate blood thinning – will require a transesophageal echocardiogram to exclude the possibility of a blood clot in the heart.
- Do not eat any food or drink any fluids after midnight the day before your test.
- Ask your physician or us if you should take your medications the day of the procedure.
- Because you will receive anesthesia with the cardioversion, arrangements must be made for a family member or friend to accompany you home after the procedure. No exceptions can be made to this requirement. If no one is available to accompany you, the procedure will have to be rescheduled.

## During the procedure

- One of our nurses will take you to a pre-operative room. A physician or nurse practitioner will discuss the procedure with you and will review your medical history.
- If you are a woman of childbearing age, a urine pregnancy test will be performed.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form.
- After you change into a hospital gown, an intravenous line (IV) will be placed in your forearm. A blood pressure monitor will be placed on your arm, and ECG stickers will be placed on your chest to monitor your heart rhythm. A large patch will be placed on your chest and on your back. This will be used for the cardioversion.
- Anesthesia will be administered through your IV. Once you are asleep, an electrical impulse will be delivered through the patches on your chest.
- Occasionally you may be given additional intravenous medication to help restore your heart beat to normal. This may require that you be monitored for at least 4 hours afterwards.
- You then will be taken to the recovery room to wake up. The physician who performed your procedure will discuss the results with you.

## After the Procedure

- You may eat immediately following the test.
- You must be accompanied home by a family member or friend. No exceptions can be made to this policy.

- You cannot operate a motor vehicle or heavy machinery for the remainder of the day.
- Occasionally the skin may be irritated at the site of the electrical patches.  
Hydrocortisone cream may be applied to alleviate discomfort.
- Contact your primary cardiologist to arrange a follow-up visit.

**Please note:** *In most cases, you must continue to take your blood thinner medication for at least four weeks following your cardioversion; many patients will require longer or indefinite treatment with coumadin. Check with your primary cardiologist to decide if and when it is safe to discontinue your blood thinner medication.*

#### ✉ Contact

---

**Weill Cornell Medical College**  
**Division of Cardiology**  
**Cardiac Electrophysiology Laboratory**  
520 East 70th Street, Starr 4,  
New York, NY 10021

Phone: (212) 746-2158

Fax: (212) 746-6951