



Your Guide To: Cardioversion



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What is an electrical cardioversion?

Cardioversion is a procedure where an electrical shock is delivered to the heart to restore a normal heart rhythm. This allows the heart to pump more effectively. The electric shocks are administered through electrodes attached to the chest while the patient is sedated.

Why do I need a cardioversion?

Cardioversion can treat many types of abnormal heart rhythms. Cardioversion can correct a heartbeat that is too fast or irregular. While some patients may not show any symptoms, others may experience difficulty breathing, fainting, low blood pressure, or chest pain. Some arrhythmias can be treated with medicine, but this means more time is needed to see results. Your physician will recommend the best method for you to restore your heart's normal rhythm.

What can I expect?

A cardioversion is performed in a hospital. Your breathing, blood pressure and heart rhythm will be monitored. Special pads will be placed on your chest and/or back. The pads are connected to an external defibrillator, which will deliver the shock when the physician is ready. If the first shock does not restore the normal heart rate, the physician may deliver additional shocks at higher energy levels. A normal heart rhythm can be restored more than 90 percent of the time, although abnormal rhythms recur in about half the patients within a year. Medications may be given to lessen the pain from the shocks.

How should I prepare?

- You will not be able to eat or drink for at least eight hours before the procedure.
- Take your regularly scheduled medications the morning of the procedure unless you are told otherwise. Your medications should only be taken with enough water to get the tablets down. If you are diabetic, discuss your medication with a doctor.
- Bring all your medications with you.
- Do not apply any lotions to your chest or back.
- You will be sedated, so you must plan for someone else to drive you home.

What are the risks of the procedure?

You may experience some minor chest discomfort or skin irritation following the procedure, particularly in areas where the pads were placed. You can apply an ointment to reduce the discomfort.

In rare cases, some cardioversion patients experience other heart rhythm problems during or after their procedure. Your doctor can prescribe medications or additional shocks to correct the problem.

Conclusions

Cardioversion is a safe and effective treatment to restore a normal heart rhythm. After the procedure, you may need to make lifestyle changes to prevent or treat conditions that can cause abnormal heart rhythm, such as high blood pressure. Your doctor may suggest that you:

- Avoid caffeine.
- Reduce your salt intake.
- Increase your physical activity.
- Quit smoking.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Eat heart-healthy foods and maintain a healthy weight.

