

Cardiology - Electrophysiology Studies and Ablation Procedures

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you are able to support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care.

When you are waiting for further treatment it can sometimes feel like a long wait. The information and advice here is aimed at helping you manage that wait so you arrive for your appointment in the best possible physical and mental health.

The NHS has limited resources which means that we are unable to treat you as quickly as we would like. Each healthcare provider has to consider the type of help you need, how quickly you need treatment, the best course of action to help you and when and where you can be seen.

The process of sorting patients based on their individual needs is called prioritisation. The system of prioritisation is applied consistently across the NHS to help us to decide the order in which patients receive their treatment. This is essential to ensure that we provide care based on need. The system means that care is delivered in the fairest way possible.

Once a referral has been made from primary care to secondary care, the specialist team conduct assessments and then agree with you on the right course of action. At this stage, the urgency will be assessed. If you have a long-term health condition, for example, you may need treatment faster than someone without.

Guidance for Patients

Within Cardiology, our waiting times for procedures has not increased significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, however the unpredictability of Covid-19 and its effects on the hospital does mean that we occasionally need to cancel procedures at the last minute. Whilst we appreciate this may be frustrating, please be assured cancellations are always a last resort and we will try our best to avoid these where possible.

While waiting for your procedure continue your medication as directed by your GP and hospital specialist. Prior to the procedure you will be given a pre-assessment appointment to discuss the procedure with a Cardiac Nurse Specialist. This is sometimes done at the time of your outpatient consultation with your doctor. During this appointment they will give you clear instructions on whether you should stop taking your usual medicines before going into hospital.

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There are several things you can do to help your condition whilst you are waiting for your procedure;

Stop Smoking

Stopping smoking is probably the single biggest favour you can do your body, and while it may not be easy, there is a lot of support to help you. You can find out about local NHS services by phoning free on 0300 123 1044. You're far more likely to quit successfully by using a combination of support and smoking cessation aids, so why not make an appointment with a local pharmacist to take the first step.

Get Active

Regular exercise not only strengthens your heart and reduces the risk of both heart attack and stroke, it also offers additional benefits by reducing your risk of Osteoporosis and the risk of depression. Public Health England recommend spending 30 minutes a day, five times a week undertaking exercises that increase your heart rate. Simple things can be done from home and incorporated into your day-to-day routine without the need for a gym membership. If exercise is a particular trigger for your palpitations/racing or irregular heart rate however, then you may want to moderate what you do in order to avoid your symptoms if they are very troublesome.

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is the single biggest risk factor for Stroke and puts additional strain on your heart and a side effect of high blood pressure can be heart rhythm abnormalities. High blood pressure can be effectively controlled in the vast majority of cases with daily medication and therefore if you are prescribed medication to control your blood pressure, it is important you continue taking it unless instructed otherwise.

Cholesterol

High Cholesterol is a contributing risk factor for heart attacks. Cholesterol is made up of LDL cholesterol and HDL cholesterol and high levels of LDL cholesterol leads to a build-up of damaging cholesterol in the coronary arteries. High cholesterol is largely down to lifestyle, but can also be caused by an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia which runs in families and means your body is unable to process cholesterol properly. Your GP or nurse can check your cholesterol levels and advise on the next steps should you need to take further action.

Lose weight

Eating a heart-healthy diet, with more fruit and veg, swapping refined (white) foods or wholegrain or wholemeal ones, and butter or saturated fat for olive oil helps to reduce weight. Keeping your weight within healthy limits relieves the pressure on your heart and helps to reduce your blood pressure which in turn will reduce your likelihood for heart rhythm abnormalities.

Reduce alcohol and caffeine

Alcohol and caffeine can increase your likelihood of experiencing palpitations/racing or irregular heart rate and reducing your intake of both may help with your symptoms. It is important not to exceed the recommended weekly alcohol intake for men and women to avoid long term harm from excessive alcohol.

Manage Anxiety

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The contents of this information has been reviewed and approved by the Medical Care Group Board of University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust

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Anxiety can lead to a cycle of unhealthy habits, including unhealthy food choices, not being active, drinking alcohol or smoking to relax you in the short term. But all of these can make you feel worse in the long term and impact your anxiety and exacerbate your symptoms.

Simple steps can help manage your anxiety including keeping active, practicing yoga or meditation at home, creating a worry list and crossing off the things you can't control to allow time to focus on those you can tackle, talking to family and friends about how you feel, avoiding stressful situations when you can by saying no to anything that increases anxiety, spending time doing calming activities you enjoy such as crafts or reading a book and practicing simple breathing exercises.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

Whilst waiting for your procedure you may continue to experience the initial symptoms that led to your specialist listing you for the procedure. If these change from what you have experienced previously, it is important to try and obtain a heart tracing (ECG) performed while experiencing these symptoms. This can be performed either at your GP surgery or by attending the Accident and Emergency Department. If this is done, please inform the Arrhythmia Nurse Specialists over the telephone.

If you have any new medical concerns, you should contact your GP.

If you experience the following medical emergencies, please dial 999;

- Unexplained collapses.
- Persistent extreme racing or irregular heart rate which makes you feel very dizzy or causes loss of consciousness.
- Severe chest pain associated with a racing or irregular heart rate.
- Severe breathlessness with a racing or irregular heart rate.

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about your upcoming procedure, please contact the arrhythmia nurse specialists on 0300 019 6154 or arrhythmia.nurses@uhd.nhs.uk.