



# Coming in for a DC cardioversion

**This leaflet answers some of the questions you may have about your direct current cardioversion. It is only a general guide and may not answer all of your questions. Please ask the doctors or nurses if you have any queries.**

## What is a direct current (DC) cardioversion?

You are on the waiting list to have a DC cardioversion. DC cardioversion is a method of returning your irregular heartbeat into a normal rhythm. This works by delivering a low-energy electric shock to your heart, using special pads on your chest. You will not need an anaesthetic but you will have a sedative to make you sleepy.

The procedure is carried out as a day case and you will be taken care of by our specialist nurses in the Jim Shahi Unit. You will be discharged home approximately two hours afterwards.

## Why do I need a DC cardioversion?

The heart has an electrical system, which makes sure that the chambers of the heart beat in a regular manner. Although the heart's pumping function may be normal, it will not work properly if there are electrical defects resulting in the heart beating too fast, or irregularly. An awareness of a rapid rhythm is often called 'palpitation' and the rapid rhythm itself is called a tachycardia.

## Preparing for your DC cardioversion

**If you are on a NOAC (novel oral anticoagulant)**, for example Dabigatran, Edoxaban, Apixaban or Rivaroxaban, **you cannot have the cardioversion if you have missed a single dose in the three weeks** leading up to your appointment.

**If you are on Warfarin**, your INR should be **above 2 for four consecutive weeks** leading up to your appointment.

It is important for you to have any blood tests required beforehand; a blood card may accompany the appointment letter. Please arrange to have the blood test at your GP or at the Royal Berkshire Hospital (or book online at [https://www.swiftqueue.co.uk/royal\\_berkshire.php](https://www.swiftqueue.co.uk/royal_berkshire.php)).

**You must not drive after the procedure**, so please make sure you arrange for a responsible adult to accompany you home.

**You can drink clear water up until 2 hours prior to your admission. No food from midnight.**

## On the day of the DC cardioversion

Your DC cardioversion will be carried out in the Jim Shahi Unit on Level 1 Battle Block at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Please bring with you:

- Any regular medication in its original packaging (you can continue to take your tablets as normal on the day of your appointment).

- Your anticoagulation INR results, if you have them.

On arrival, you will have an ECG (heart trace) to confirm you are in the correct rhythm to have a cardioversion.

The Jim Shahi Unit is an emergency department and there may be unforeseen delays. Please bring something to read or occupy your time.

### **What happens next?**

- A member of staff will check your name and details.
- We will check your blood results to see if they are within the correct limits for a cardioversion.
- A cannula (small plastic tube) will be put into a vein in your hand or arm. The sedative will be given through this tube.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be recorded.
- We will tell you again what will happen during the procedure and the doctor will ask you to sign a consent form.

### **What happens during the DC cardioversion?**

- You will be taken to the procedure room on your bed.
- Monitoring leads will be attached to your shoulders and chest to watch your heart rate.
- We will place a probe on your finger to monitor the oxygen levels in your blood.
- An oxygen mask will be put over your mouth and nose.
- We will give you a sedative through the tube in your arm and you will gradually relax and fall asleep.
- Two large defibrillation pads will be stuck onto your chest and you will be given up to three low-energy electric shocks.
- Another heart trace will be carried out to confirm your heart rhythm is okay.
- The whole procedure will take about 20 minutes.

### **After the DC cardioversion**

- You will be moved back to the ward on your bed.
- Your pulse and blood pressure will be monitored until you are back to normal.
- You may feel slightly drowsy and you will need a responsible adult to take you home.
- You may experience a slight skin irritation in the areas on your chest where the electric shocks were given. If this happens, we can give you some soothing cream.
- When you feel more awake, you will be offered something to eat and drink.
- The doctor will visit you to give you your results and to let you know of any necessary changes to your medication.
- You may be given a follow-up outpatient appointment, depending on your result.
- Please continue with your Warfarin/oral anticoagulant, unless the doctor advises you otherwise.
- **Please remember, you must not drive for 12 hours after the procedure.**

## What are the risks of a DC cardioversion?

Risks from a cardioversion are very small.

- The most common complication is **skin redness** over the chest area. This can be relieved with a skin cream, which we can give you, if required.
- There is a very small risk of having a **stroke**. However, providing blood-thinning treatment has been given satisfactorily beforehand, the risk of this happening is 1 in every 200 patients.
- There is also a rare incidence of extreme **bradycardia**, which may require temporary pacing.

If the procedure is successful, you will usually have a Cardiology follow-up appointment. When you come to clinic, you will have an ECG to confirm that you are still in 'normal rhythm'. If you are, you may be allowed to stop taking your Warfarin/anticoagulant.

## Useful contacts

Royal Berkshire Hospital	0118 322 5111
Jim Shahi Unit	0118 322 6502
Cardiac Appointments	0118 322 6676
Cardiac Support Nurses	0118 322 6638
Cardiac Care Unit	0118 322 6684
NHS 111:	111
NHS website:	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk">www.nhs.uk</a>
British Heart Foundation:	<a href="http://www.bhf.org.uk">www.bhf.org.uk</a>

This leaflet is printed privately for the Cardiac Fund. It was set up in 1976 for the purpose of providing cardiac services that would otherwise not be available through National Health resources. Our Cardiac Laboratory was largely equipped through the fund and many other areas in the Department have also benefited from equipment and staff training.

If you would like to contribute please scan the QR code below to donate direct to the fund online, alternatively, cheques should be made payable to:

### The Royal Berks Charity Cardiac Fund U226

Royal Berks Charity  
Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust London Road  
Reading RG1 5AN Telephone 0118 322 8860 [www.royalberkscharity.co.uk](http://www.royalberkscharity.co.uk)



To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

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