

Preparing for Cardioversion

A Patient & Family Education Booklet



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What is Cardioversion?

Cardioversion is a brief procedure in which an electrical shock is delivered to the heart to convert an irregular or fast heart rhythm (called an arrhythmia) to a normal rhythm. During cardioversion, the physician (cardiologist or internist) uses a cardioverter machine to send a selected amount of electrical energy (or a “shock”) to the heart muscle to restore the normal heart rhythm.

Why am I having this procedure?

Your heart is beating in an irregular rhythm known as Atrial Fibrillation or Atrial Flutter. With either of these two rhythms the upper portions of the heart do not contract and pump blood out to the body properly. While some people feel no symptoms, others may be aware of palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness or chest discomfort. Even if you barely notice any symptoms, irregular heart rhythms that are left untreated can lead to more serious problems, such as heart attack or stroke. The ‘blood thinner’ medication that you are taking (ie. Warfarin or Coumadin) greatly reduces your risk.

It is important that you take your blood thinner as prescribed and have INR blood tests drawn at the lab as ordered by your physician. INR (International Normalized Ratio) measures the ‘thinness’ of your blood and typically should be in the 2.0-3.0 range when taking Warfarin (Coumadin). Your cardioversion may need to be delayed and rescheduled if your INR falls below 2.0 at any point in the 4 weeks prior to the procedure.

Preparation before coming to the hospital

How will I know when my cardioversion will be done?

Your physician will send a booking request to Lions Gate Hospital for your cardioversion. A staff member from your physician’s office will contact you with the date and time of

your procedure. Typically the time that you will be given is 7 a.m. on the day of the procedure. The time that you are advised to report for the procedure is the check-in time and not the actual time of the procedure. The check-in time allows for final preparations to occur before the procedure.

Preparation Checklists:

General Instructions

- Read this booklet thoroughly and make notes of questions to ask your physician or other healthcare team members prior to your procedure
- Arrange for someone to take you home after your cardioversion and to stay with you for the first 24 hours. You can anticipate that you will be discharged from hospital between 9–10:00 a.m. Please note that due to the medications you receive, you will be considered legally impaired and will not be permitted to drive yourself or to take a taxi or bus home alone. If you are unable to make these arrangements, your procedure will need to be re-scheduled to another day on which you are able to arrange a ride and for someone to stay with you at home overnight.
- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight on the day prior to your cardioversion. This includes avoiding chewing gum or candy.
- Take your medications on the morning of your procedure with a small sip of water. If you are diabetic, do not take your insulin or oral diabetes medications that morning – these can be taken when you return home.
- Take a bath or shower on the evening before or morning of your procedure. Avoid the use of make-up or nail polish. Do not use deodorant, body powder or lotion on your chest or back as these may interfere with the adhesive pads that are placed during the cardioversion.



What to Bring to Hospital:

- Your Health Care Card (Care Card)
- All of your prescription and non-prescription medications in their original, labeled bottles or containers. Please include any vitamins and herbal remedies.
- An interpreter, if you do not speak English.
- Any necessary items such as dentures, hearing aides and eyeglasses. Contact lenses should not be worn.
- Any walking aid that you use. (cane, walker, wheelchair etc.). Please label it with your name and contact information.
- Wear comfortable, easy to fold clothing. A gown, housecoat and slippers will be provided for you.
- The phone number of the person who will be picking you up after your procedure.

What Not to Bring to Hospital:

- Unnecessary money (\$20 maximum is recommended), or credit/bank cards
- Valuables or jewelry
- A lot of personal items or clothing
- Pets – except for approved dogs to support special needs

The Day of your Cardioversion:

When and where do I check in?

Check in at 6:45 a.m. at the Admitting Department located on the first floor of the hospital. See the map on the last page of this booklet for directions. There you will be asked for your Care Card and given some forms to take with you to the Surgical Services Care Unit (SSCU) located on the second floor of the hospital. At the SSCU desk, an Admitting Clerk will greet you and provide you with a hospital gown, housecoat and slippers to change into. Your belongings will be stored securely in a locked locker.

What happens prior to the procedure?

A nurse will take you to the Post Anesthesia Recovery Room (PAR) where your cardioversion will take place. You will be made comfortable on a stretcher and your nurse will verify your details and ask you some questions regarding your health history. He/she will also take your temperature, blood pressure, pulse and weight.

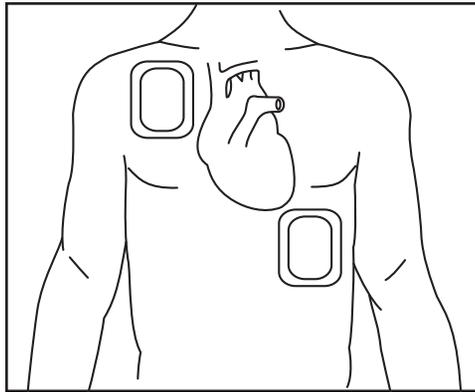
She/he will also start an intravenous (IV) in your arm that will later be used to administer a short acting anesthetic and an analgesic medication during your cardioversion.

The nurse will place you on the heart monitor by placing adhesive patches on your chest. Your cardiologist will meet with you, explain the cardioversion procedure, answer any questions that you may have and have you sign a consent form. You will also meet the anesthetist; the physician that will administer a short acting anesthetic and an analgesic medication prior to the procedure. The anesthetist will also monitor your breathing and provide you with oxygen by way of a mask should you require it during the procedure.

The Cardioversion Procedure

What happens during the procedure?

Your physician, nurse and anesthetist will constantly monitor you throughout the procedure. A short-acting anesthetic medication and analgesic will be given through your IV to ensure that you fall asleep prior to the procedure. While you are asleep, your physician will use a cardioverter machine (defibrillator) to deliver specific amounts of energy to your heart through cardioversion patches or paddles that are applied to your chest. The shock interrupts the heart's abnormal electrical rhythm to restore a normal rhythm. Although the procedure takes only a few seconds, more than one attempt may be needed to restore the heart rhythm to normal. You will be asleep for approximately 5-15 minutes.



What should I expect during the recovery period?

You will continue to be monitored and will gradually wake up after the procedure. An ECG (Electrocardiogram) may be performed to confirm your heart rhythm.

Once you are fully awake, your physician will advise you as to whether the cardioversion was successful in converting your heart rate to normal. Instructions for discharge will be reviewed and any questions that you may have will be answered. Your physician will also discuss your medications and when to book a follow-up appointment.

After a period of being monitored, you will be offered a light refreshment and prepared for discharge.

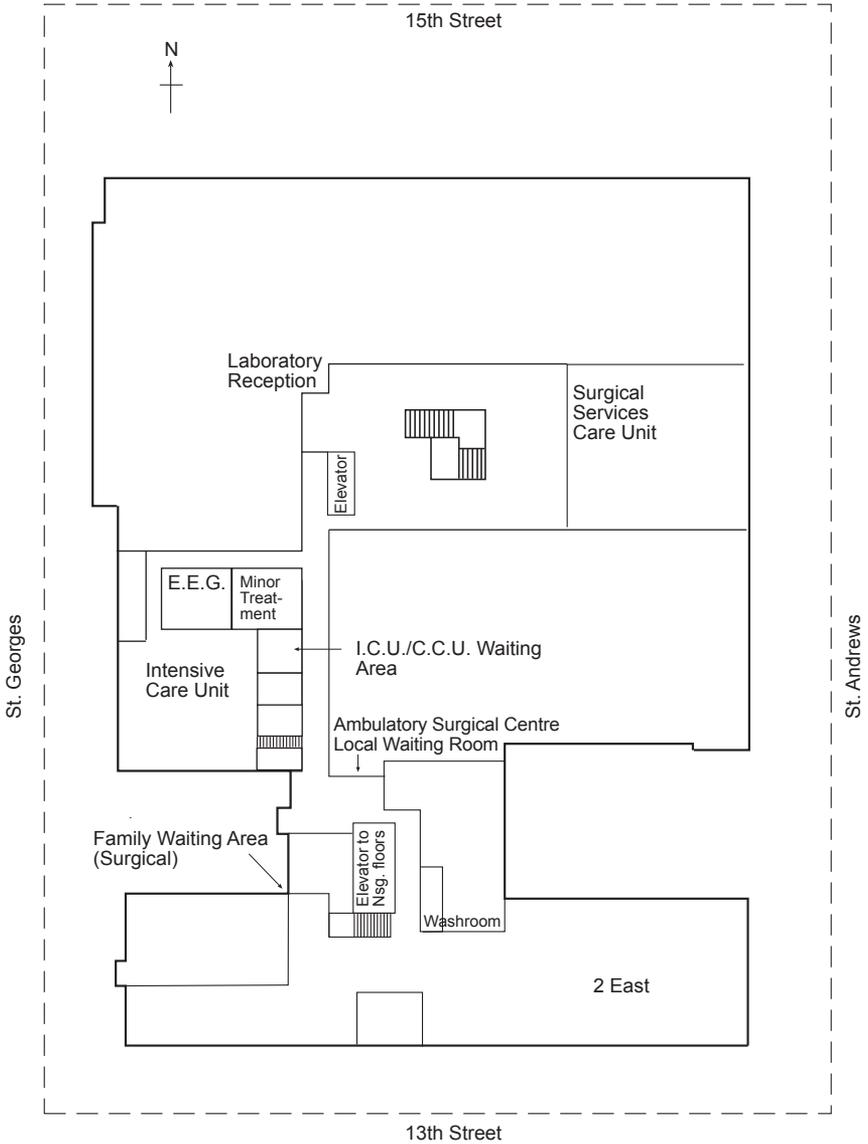
How will I feel after the procedure?

You may feel tenderness on your chest wall where the cardioversion pads were placed. You may find that application of products that relieve sunburn and use of mild off the shelf analgesics offer some relief.

It is important that you rest. Do not do any exercises or exert yourself for the remainder of the day. It is also important that you do not drive, operate any machinery or sign any legal documents for the remainder of the day.

Contact your physician's office for a follow-up appointment when you arrive home.

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