

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Cardiac resynchronisation therapy for heart failure

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when **cardiac resynchronisation therapy** should be used to treat people with heart failure in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It does not cover using this therapy to treat other types of heart problems. It is written for people with heart failure but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe heart failure or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.



This is not the only possible treatment for heart failure. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

Cardiac resynchronisation therapy using a **pacing device** is recommended as a possible treatment for people with heart failure where all of the following circumstances apply.

- They have moderate to severe symptoms of heart failure that are affecting their daily life, measuring class 3 or class 4 in the New York Heart Association classification system.
- Their heart is beating regularly but an electrocardiogram (ECG) shows that the electrical system of the heart is not working properly.
- The left ventricle of their heart is pumping out less than 35% of its normal amount of blood (called the left ventricular ejection fraction).
- They are taking the drug treatment that is most effective for them.

NICE has said that a different type of pacing device, containing a **defibrillator**, may be considered for people with heart failure if:

- Their heart failure is suitable for treatment with a pacing device – in other words, all the circumstances in the list above apply.
- And it is also suitable for treatment with a device called an implantable cardioverter defibrillator.

Implantable cardioverter defibrillators are suitable for:

- Some people who have problems called ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation, where the ventricles of their heart beat faster than normal. These problems can cause fainting or a cardiac arrest, where the heart stops beating.
- Some people who have had a heart attack more than 4 weeks previously and have ventricular tachycardia.

Heart failure

The heart is a muscle that normally contracts in a regular rhythm to pump blood around the body. Heart failure can be caused by a number of factors that make the heart a less efficient pump. One cause of heart failure is when the left ventricle, one of the lower chambers of the heart, starts pumping out of time with the rest of the heart. This is called left ventricular systolic dysfunction.

Cardiac resynchronisation therapy

Cardiac resynchronisation therapy (also known as biventricular pacing) brings the pumping action of the heart chambers back in time with each other, to make the heart more efficient. It is suitable for some people with heart failure caused by left ventricular systolic dysfunction. The person has an operation to put a device called a pacing device into their chest. This is attached to the heart chambers using three tiny leads. This device can also have a defibrillator added to deliver a small electric current to the heart if it starts beating irregularly. It is then called a defibrillator device.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if you have heart failure, and your doctor thinks that cardiac resynchronisation therapy is the right treatment for you, you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you appear to be eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information about heart failure

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with heart failure. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Action Heart, 01384 456111 ext. 1470,
www.actionheart.com
- Arrhythmia Alliance, 01789 450787,
www.rrhythmiaalliance.org.uk
- British Heart Foundation, 08450 708070,
www.bhf.org.uk
- The Cardiomyopathy Association, 0800 018 1024,
www.cardiomyopathy.org
- Cardiac Risk for the Young (CRY), 01737 363222,
www.c-r-y.org.uk

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/TA120

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1266).

There is more information on what NICE has said about implantable cardioverter defibrillators at www.nice.org.uk/TA095