

Traveling with Pacemakers, Implantable Defibrillators, Implanted Metal Devices, & Coronary Stents

“People with pacemakers, implantable defibrillators, or coronary stents should carry a card or doctor’s letter documenting the presence, kind, location, and electronic characteristics of the implanted device. An implanted metal device may trigger an alarm as the person passes through electronic security. Electronic security devices do not generally affect implantable defibrillators, but travelers are advised to avoid standing in walk-through metal detectors for more than 15 seconds. Hand-held metal detectors are also safe for people with defibrillators, but prolonged contact, such as holding the detector over the defibrillator for more than 5 seconds, should be avoided.”¹

If you have concerns about your medical device while traveling or entering security checkpoints, talk with your doctor. He/she can provide the information you need to be prepared. It is okay to ask for special measures at security checkpoints, but be prepared that this may mean a pat down search of the body. As long as you make security personnel aware of your condition ahead of time, however, this can all be handled in a smooth and appropriate fashion so that all can arrive at their destination safely and with the least risk for negative health consequences.

Here are some tips from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)² that may help:

- If you have an implanted medical device that you would like to remain private and confidential, ask the security officer to please be discreet when assisting you through the screening process.
- It is recommended (but not required) that individuals with a pacemaker carry a pacemaker identification card (ID) when going through airport security. Show the security officer your pacemaker ID, if you have one, and ask the security officer to conduct a pat-down inspection rather than having you walk through the metal detector or be handwanded.

- It is recommended (but not required) that you advise the security officer that you have an implanted pacemaker, other implanted medical device, or metal implant and where that implant is located.
- The security officer will offer you a private screening once it becomes known that you have a metal implant or implanted medical device.
- If your doctor has indicated that you should not go through the metal detector or be handwanded because it could affect the functionality of your device or the magnetic calibration of your device, or if you are concerned, ask the security officer for a pat-down inspection instead.
- Security officers will need to resolve all alarms associated with metal implants. Most alarms will be able to be resolved during a pat-down; therefore, clothing will not be required to be removed or lifted as part of the inspection process.²

Whatever the process required, be prepared by knowing what to expect, requesting pat-down options when necessary, and having recommended identification of your medical device(s) available. Try to remain calm and unagitated. The security personnel are there for your protection and the protection of all travelers.

Sources:

1. Merck & Company (2003). Travel and health: Merck manual home edition [on-line]. Retrieved February 22, 2008. From <http://www.merck.com/mmhe/print/sec25/ch303/ch303a.html>.
2. Transportation Security Administration (2008). Hidden disabilities [on-line]. Retrieved February 26, 2008. From http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm.