

St. Luke's Heart Care Services Patient / Family Information

External Elective Cardioversion

What is an External Cardioversion?

An External Cardioversion is a procedure used to treat someone's heart that is beating either too fast or in an irregular rhythm such as atrial fibrillation or atrial flutter. The heart is shocked in order to restore the normal electrical activity of your heart.

Cardioversion Machine

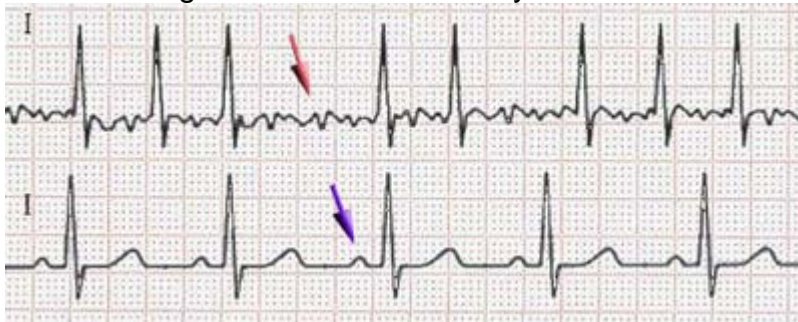


Why is an External Cardioversion performed?

When someone's heart rhythm beats too fast for a long period of time the heart becomes overworked and can weaken causing permanent damage. Some people become very short of breath or dizzy when their heart rate speeds up. Getting the heart rate to slow down can help eliminate those problems. Cardioversion is also performed when someone's heart rate becomes irregular, such as atrial fibrillation or atrial flutter. If the heart remains in one of these rhythms for a long time without taking a blood thinning medication, you could be at risk for having a stroke.

Top: Irregular heart rhythm: Atrial Fibrillation

Bottom: Regular or normal heart rhythm



Where is a Cardioversion performed?

A Cardioversion is most often performed in a hospital. At St. Luke's a scheduled Cardioversion is performed in the Heart Center, but it can also be performed in your hospital room or the Emergency Department if necessary.

What should I expect before the procedure?

You will be scheduled for a Cardioversion by a heart doctor. The heart doctor's office will schedule a date and time with the St. Luke's Heart Center. You will be asked to not eat or drink anything 6 to 8 hours before your appointment time. You will be asked to arrive to the Heart Center 2 hours prior to your procedure time and you must have someone to drive you to and from the hospital following the procedure. During those 2 hours a nurse will prepare you for the procedure by providing education, starting an IV with fluids, taking blood samples, performing an EKG, and monitoring your vital signs such as your heart rate and blood pressure.

What should I expect during the procedure?

At the time of the procedure your heart doctor, 1 to 2 nurses, and a respiratory therapist will be in your room to care for you. You will be connected to the Cardioversion machine along with other monitoring equipment for safety. The heart doctor or the nurse will give you medication through an IV to make you fall asleep so you won't feel any pain or remember the shock. When you're asleep the machine will shock your heart in an attempt to return your heart's rhythm back to normal.

What should I expect after the procedure?

You will gradually wake up after the procedure is completed. You will remain in the Heart Center for approximately 2 hours so the nurse can observe you to make sure it's safe for you to go home. The nurse will review any changes in your home medications and help you set up follow-up appointments to see your heart doctor before you leave the Heart Center. Your family or friends will drive you home. **You will not be allowed to drive yourself home or be allowed to drive for 24 hours following your procedure.**

When will I know the results of the procedure?

The heart doctor will discuss the results of the procedure with you and your family or companion after the procedure has been completed or when you wake up from the procedure.

Outpatient Instructions:

The heart doctor that ordered the test for you will call St. Luke's to schedule the procedure. You will be pre-registered for the test so you will not have to register at the Outpatient Registration Desk. The Heart Center will attempt to contact you the day before your test to gather information and remind you of your arrival time. Please bring a list of your medications that you are currently taking to the Heart Center on the day of your procedure.

Name: _____

Exam Date and Time: _____

Please contact the St. Luke's Heart Center at (319) 369-7400 if you have question regarding your procedure.