

# CARDIOVASCULAR CONSULTANTS, P.A.

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## Cardioversion Therapy

*James L. Cockrell, M.D., FACC & RG Brockman, M.D.*

Cardioversion is commonly used to safely restore a natural heart rhythm among patients with a variety of rhythm disorders known by the medical staff as “cardiac arrhythmias.” When medicine (anti-arrhythmic medication) has not completely restored the natural rhythm, or when more severe or short-lived cardiac arrhythmias are present, a controlled corrective pulse of electrical energy or “cardioversion” promptly converts the cardiac rhythm to normal.

Just before this procedure, the patient is asked not to eat or drink anything. The medical staff will let the patient know whether specific medicine, particularly anti-arrhythmic heart medicines, should be taken prior to the cardioversion. Routine blood-testing may be recommended. In addition, blood-thinning medicines (Coumadin/ Warfarin) are important for certain patients and directions regarding this special medicine will be given before the procedure.

In preparation for the cardioversion, an “IV” (access to your blood) will be placed in the patients arm for fluids and medications. The cardioversion takes place in a room where monitoring equipment is available. Special sticky hand-sized plastic patches, used to deliver the electrical pulse and monitor heart rhythm, are carefully applied to the chest and left side or back area. Sedatives will be given through the IV to make the patient sleep for a few minutes. Once the patient is sleeping, a carefully controlled pulse of electrical energy is passed between the special patches. The pulse is large enough to synchronize all electrical activity within the heart, and to restore a natural organized heart rhythm. The pulse of electricity does not hurt the chest or heart, but would be painful to the patient if fully awake. After the cardioversion, the patient soon returns to wakefulness, *usually* with a normal heart rhythm restored. The team will promptly let the patient know if the cardioversion was successful. It is quite normal to remain somewhat sleepy for a period after the cardioversion.

The benefits of cardioversion, to restore a natural heart rhythm, usually far outweighs the risks. Not only may a cardioversion improve symptoms and improve heart pumping efficiency, but such treatment may improve heart function, lower risks of stroke, and possibly prolong life expectancy. Cardioversion is usually successful in restoring the ordered natural heart rhythm in the short-term. Long-term results may vary, many patients need pacemaker or drug therapy for continued long-term success, and some patients need repeat cardioversion, particularly within two years. The specific risks and benefits that pertain to individual patients should be discussed and known before the procedure.

After cardioversion most patients rapidly return to feeling quite normal, and many are aware of improvement in how they feel. Some skin irritation and redness may be expected just where the sticky patches were placed for the cardioversion. This usually disappears with time, and some patients feel more comfortable with a moisturizing cream as needed. While specific recommendations may vary, it is common for patients to resume activity within a few hours of treatment. Follow-up treatment plans and any questions you may have will be addressed by the medical staff.