

Why can't the patient sit up?

The leg with the balloon pump must be kept straight so it can work properly. Even though the catheter is secured in place with stitches, any moving of the leg or sitting up can cause the catheter to kink or move out of place. There is also a chance that moving could damage the femoral artery and even the aorta. This could result in life-threatening bleeding.

Can the patient eat while the pump is in place?

This depends on their condition.

If they are on a breathing machine, they will probably get fed through a tube directly in to their stomach.

If they are breathing on their own, the doctors will determine what kind of nutrition is best for them.

Contact us

The Cardiac Surgery ICU team are here to support you during this difficult time. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Direct Phone Number: 604 520-4725

Image: Teleflex Medical Canada Inc, Teleflex Incorporated

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Family Guide to Intra-Aortic Balloon Pump



Cardiac Surgery Intensive Care Unit
(CSICU)



What is an Intra-Aortic Balloon Pump?

An intra-aortic balloon pump is a machine that helps support a person's heart to pump when the heart is weak or not working properly.

You might hear us refer to the machine as the 'balloon', 'balloon pump', or 'pump'.

There is a balloon attached to a flexible tube called a catheter. The balloon is placed near the heart in the largest artery in the body - the aorta ('intra' means into or inside).

We attach the catheter to the machine. The machine tells the balloon to inflate and deflate between heartbeats.

As the machine works, you will hear different alarms and sounds coming from the machine. Don't worry. This is a part of pumps normal working.

How does it work?

The balloon pump helps the heart by making it easier for the heart to pump blood around the body. It also increases the blood flow to the heart muscle and other organs.

The balloon pump does not take over for the heart. The heart continues to beat on its own.

Why is the balloon pump used?

The pump can be used to help the heart:

- during severe chest pain (angina)
- during or after a heart attack
- during severe congestive heart failure
- during or after a procedure to open a blocked artery in the heart muscle (called angioplasty)
- before, during, or after open heart surgery
- while waiting for a heart transplant

How is it inserted?

The catheter is put into a large artery in the groin, called the femoral artery. The catheter is then advanced along the artery until it is placed in the aorta.

This procedure can be done in the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory, the Operating Room, or the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit.

When will the balloon pump be removed?

The pump is left in place until it is no longer needed, usually a few days. The length of time a patient has the pump depends on his or her condition. The CSICU doctor checks on the patient's condition regularly to decide when it is best to be removed.

What happens while the pump is in place?

Patients are closely monitored to reduce the chances of complications and treat any that might occur right away.

We arrange for an x-ray every day while the pump is in place. This helps us make sure the balloon is still in the right place.

We might give a blood thinner (called heparin) through the intravenous. This helps to stop any blood clots from forming on the balloon.

The nurse regularly checks the patient's:

- pulses in the feet
- the area in the groin where the catheter goes through the skin
- blood pressure and heart rate

Are there any risks or complications?

Like any medical procedure, there is a chance of a complication, but they don't happen often.

The femoral artery could get damaged where the catheter enters the body, causing reduced blood flow to the leg, and/or bleeding around the catheter.

Blood thinners can increase the chance of bleeding.

Anytime there is cut in the skin, there is a chance of infection. This chance increases the longer the catheter is left in place.