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A defibrillator is not the end of the game: implantable cardioverter-defibrillator in young athletes

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Sudden cardiac arrest during sports is rare but serious, even in asymptomatic young people. It may be caused by inherited heart conditions and cardiac rhythm disorders that, under certain circumstances, can lead to life-threatening arrhythmias. Timely identification of risk conditions, appropriate treatment, and access to emergency medical care are important factors in prevention.[1] The possibility of continued sports participation among young people with an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator requires individualized risk assessment, careful consideration of safety, psychological support, and the involvement of nurses in patient care.

An ICD is a device that detects certain dangerous cardiac arrhythmias and, when necessary, delivers therapy to terminate them. It is implanted to prevent sudden cardiac arrest in people at increased risk, either after survival of a life-threatening rhythm disorder or because of an assessed risk associated with a particular heart condition. ICD implantation does not automatically mean a permanent end to participation in sports. In young people with an ICD, careful consideration is required of the underlying heart condition, the risk of arrhythmias, the type of sport, and the possible consequences of device activation.[2] The decision should be made on an individual basis, in collaboration with specialists, the young person, and their family, with a clear explanation of the benefits, risks, and possible limitations. In addition to physical safety, the emotional and social needs of the young athlete are important. The nurse helps educate the patient and family about the device's function, monitoring health status, and recognizing symptoms that require medical assessment. The nurse also provides emotional support, encourages open communication, and participates in planning a safe return to everyday and sporting activities. It is important to emphasize that returning to sport does not involve the same level of risk for every patient and that the activity plan should be tailored to the individual.[1,2]

An implantable cardioverter-defibrillator is an important component of sudden cardiac arrest prevention, but care for a young athlete does not end with its implantation. Individualized assessment, informed decision-making, ongoing education, and emotional support are essential for quality of life and consideration of a return to sport. The nurse's role is to connect professional care with an understanding of the young patient's fears, needs, and life goals. An ICD does not have to mean the end of a sporting journey, but rather the beginning of a new, carefully planned, and safer chapter.

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