



AFTER YOUR HEART SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS

You have recovered adequately from your surgery and are now ready to leave the hospital. Here are guidelines that will provide answers to many of your questions and concerns as well as give you something to review after you are at home.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT DURING A NORMAL RECOVERY FROM SURGERY

- ♥ Your appetite may be depressed. It may take several weeks for your appetite to return to normal. Many people notice that their sense of taste is diminished or almost absent – it will return. Some people occasionally note nausea at the smell of food for a week or two after surgery.
- ♥ You may have some swelling, especially if you have an incision in your leg. That leg will tend to swell more for some time. Elevating your legs will help. Wear your elastic stockings if they were prescribed for you.
- ♥ You may have difficulty sleeping at night. You may find it difficult to fall asleep, or you may find that you wake up at 2:00 or 3:00 AM and cannot fall back to sleep. This will improve. Taking a pain pill before bed sometimes helps.
- ♥ Constipation may become a problem. Take a stool softener as prescribed. You may use a laxative of your choice. Add more fruits, fiber and juice (unless you have diabetes) in your diet.
- ♥ You may note mood swings and feel down. You may have good days and bad days. Do not become discouraged. This will get better.

TAKING SHOWERS

- ♥ You can take showers after your pacing wires are out. Avoid very hot water.

DRESSING

- ♥ Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes that do not put pressure on your incisions.

CARING FOR YOUR CHEST INCISION

- ♥ After you leave the hospital it is safe to wash your incisions daily with an antibacterial soap (such as Dial or Safeguard) and warm water. Avoid vigorous scrubbing. Do not soak your incisions in a tub bath or hot tub until healed.
- ♥ You may notice the skin glue flaking from the incision. This is normal.
- ♥ You might go home with staples in your leg or chest. We will remove them during an office visit.
- ♥ Keep in mind that incisions may sunburn easily. Be sure to protect your incisions from over exposure to sunlight during the first year after surgery.
- ♥ The scar will darken if exposed to sun.
- ♥ Do not apply any lotions, creams, oils, or powders to or on your incisions.
- ♥ Check your incisions every day. Notify your doctor if you notice any of the following:
 - Increased tenderness of the incision line
 - Increased redness or swelling around the edges of the incision line
 - Any drainage from the incision line
 - A persistent fever greater than 100.5 or chills

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CARING FOR YOUR INCISIONS

If your surgery involved taking a vein from your leg for use as a bypass graft, follow these guidelines:

- ♥ Care for your leg incision as instructed for your chest incision as described above.
- ♥ Avoid crossing your legs because this impairs circulation.
- ♥ Avoid sitting in one position or standing for prolonged periods of time.
- ♥ Elevate your leg on a stool or coffee table when sitting. You can also lie on a couch and elevate your legs on the arm of the couch.
- ♥ Check your leg daily for swelling. The swelling should decrease when you elevate your leg, but it might recur when you stand. If you continue to have leg swelling or it becomes worse, notify your doctor.
- ♥ If they were prescribed for you, wear your elastic stockings while you are up and about for at least two weeks after you leave the hospital. The stockings help decrease swelling. Remove your stockings at bedtime. Wash the stockings with mild soap and water, and dry them on a line.
- ♥ You may notice a lump at the top of your breastbone incision or along your leg incision (if you have one). These will disappear with time.
- ♥ You may notice an occasional "clicking noise" or sensation in your chest in the first days after surgery. This should occur less often over time and go away completely within the first couple of weeks after you return home. If it gets worse or doesn't go away, call your surgeon.
- ♥ You may have muscle pain or tightness in your shoulders and upper back between your shoulder blades. This will get better with time. Your pain medicine will also help relieve this discomfort.
- ♥ You may have numbness in the skin to the left of your breastbone incision if a chest artery known as the mammary artery was used during your surgery for a bypass.
- ♥ You may be impatient in your recovery. You should make progress but it still takes 4 to 6 weeks for full recovery.

LIFTING

- ♥ You should not put too much strain on your breastbone while it is healing. Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling anything heavier than 10 pounds for 6 weeks after surgery – this includes carrying children, groceries, and suitcases, mowing the grass, vacuuming, and moving furniture. Don't hold your breath during any activity especially when you lift anything or when you use the rest room.

CLIMBING STAIRS

- ♥ You can climb stairs unless your doctor tells you differently. Take stairs at a slow pace. Stop and rest if you get tired. When you use the handrail, do not pull yourself up. Simply use the handrail to steady yourself.



RESTING

- ♥ You must have a balance of rest and exercise during your recovery. Rest between activities and take short naps as necessary. Resting means to sit quietly for 20-30 minutes. Do not exercise for 30 minutes after you have eaten.

WALKING

- ♥ Walking is one of the best forms of exercise because it increases the blood flow throughout your body and to your heart muscle. Increase your activity gradually. Walk at your own pace. Stop and rest if you get tired. Each person progresses at a different rate after heart surgery. Be sure to pace your activities throughout the day. Do not try to do too many things at one time. When the outside temperature is less than 40 degrees or greater than 80 degrees, consider walking in indoor shopping malls. In cold weather, wear a scarf or mask around your mouth and nose.

HAVING SEX

- ♥ You can resume sexual relations when you feel comfortable unless instructed differently by your doctor. For most people this is about 2 to 4 weeks after leaving the hospital. Please ask your doctor or nurse for more detailed information, if needed.

DRIVING

- ♥ You can ride as a passenger in a car at any time. Avoid driving, outdoor bicycling, or motorcycle riding for 6 weeks after surgery. This time period is recommended to allow your breastbone (sternum) to heal. Your traveling about may be limited and slow before the 6 weeks are up. When you travel be sure to get out of the car every 2 hours and walk around for a few minutes.

RETURNING TO WORK

- ♥ Check with your surgeon before returning to work, but most people will be able to return to light work 6 to 12 weeks after surgery.

WATCHING YOUR DIET

- ♥ Your doctors recommend that you follow a low fat, no added salt diet after you leave the hospital. This can reduce your risk of a heart attack in the future or needing surgery again. You should try to have less than 30% of your calories from fat. Try to control your weight and eat less saturated fat and cholesterol. The American Heart Association recommends that saturated fat intake should be 8 to 10 percent of total calories. Polyunsaturated fat intake should be up to 10 percent of total calories. Monounsaturated fatty acids make up the rest of the total fat intake and should be no more than 15 percent of total calories. Cholesterol intake should be less than 300 milligrams per day. Sodium (salt) intake should be no more than 2,400 milligrams (2.4 grams) per day. Avoid adding salt in cooking or at the table. Begin making changes to your diet when your appetite returns to normal.



TAKING MEDICATIONS

- ♥ The physician assistant or nurse practitioner will give you and provide additional information about your medications before you leave the hospital.
- ♥ Take your medications exactly as your doctor prescribes.
- ♥ Do not take other medications without telling your doctor.
- ♥ Keep a current list of your medications, dosages, and times to be taken in your wallet or purse.
- ♥ Call us if you think you are having side effects from your medications such as excessive nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, severe constipation, stomach pain, a dizzy or lightheaded feeling when standing, confusion, extremely slow or fast pulse, skin rash, or unusual bruising or bleeding.
- ♥ **Bring all of your medications in their bottles to our office for each of your office visits.**

WATCH OUT FOR THESE EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Go to the Emergency room or call 9-1-1 if you have any of these problems:

- Sudden onset of headache or abdominal pain
- Bright red blood coughed from the lungs, vomited or noticed in your stool
- Heart rate greater than 150 beats per minute
- Angina type pain
- Fainting or sudden numbness or weakness noted in arms or legs

WATCH FOR THESE URGENT PROBLEMS

Call your personal physician or your surgeon if you have any of these problems:

- Worsening lower leg or foot swelling
- Increasing shortness of breath
- Chills or a temperature of 100.5 degrees or greater
- Increasing redness, swelling, tenderness, or drainage of your incisions
- Extreme fatigue
- A flare up of gout
- Burning when you urinate

CARDIAC REHABILITATION

We may refer you to a cardiac rehabilitation program. These programs involve education about your heart conditions as well as an exercise routine designed specifically to your needs. We use the Healthplex in Albuquerque. If you live out of town a cardiac rehabilitation program may be nearby.

ASK US

We are pleased to answer your questions or discuss your condition with other health care professionals.