Homeward Bound:
Going Home After Cardiac Surgery

Information for patients who have had cardiac surgery and their families

Read this booklet to learn about:

- What to do before you go home
- What to do while healing at home
- Helpful resources in the community
- Helpful books and websites

Please talk to a member of your health care team if you have any questions.

General Websites (continued)

American Heart Association
http://www.americanheart.org
Provides a wide range of cardiovascular health and stroke topics.

Heart Failure Online
www.heartfailure.org/index.htm
Provides information to patients with heart failure.

British Heart Foundation
www.bhf.org.uk
Click on “Hearthealth” icon to find valuable information about heart disease and related issues.

Glossary of Heart Terms
This glossary from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health can help you understand heart disease and its symptoms.

Heart Information Network
http://www.healthcentral.com/heart-disease
Provides information to heart patients and others interested in learning about lowering risk factors for heart disease.

Up to Date Patient Information
http://www.uptodate.com/home/index.html
Provides an overview as well as details about heart disease.

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

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Cardiac Rehab Websites

Be Active After Heart Surgery
http://www.patienteducation.ca
Provides helpful information about how to be active during recovery after heart surgery.

CardiacCare Network of Ontario
http://www.ccn.on.ca/
CCN's goals are to improve quality, efficiency, access and equity for cardiac services in Ontario. It monitors waiting lists for cardiac procedures at Ontario hospitals.

Cardiac Rehabilitation – Toronto Rehab
http://www.torontorehab.on.ca/patient/cardiac/index.htm
This website can provide you with information, motivation and support to maintain heart-healthy habits.

General Websites

Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada
http://www.heartandstroke.on.ca/site/c.pv131eNWJwW/b.3581583/k.F7E3/Heart_Disease_Stroke_and_Healthy_Living.htm
Click on “Heart Disease”, “Stroke”, and “Healthy Living” for patient education information.

Nevil Thomas Adult Congenital Heart Library
www.achd-online.com
Provides access to multimedia learning resources on the subject of congenital heart defects in the adolescent and adult.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Provides health information for patients/public, health professional, and educators. See their Disease and Conditions Index for a quick and easy way to get updated information.
Nutrition and Healthy Heart Eating Cookbooks

Book Names


Bonnie Stern, More Heart Smart Cooking. (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, 1997)

Vesanto Melina and Joseph Forest, Cooking Vegetarian. (Macmillan Canada, 1996)

Kay Spicer, Multicultural Cooking Light and Easy. (Mighton House, 1995)

Stephen Wong, Heart Smart Chinese Cooking. (Douglas and McIntyre, 1996)

Hrishna Jamal, Heart Smart Flavors of India. (Douglas and McIntyre, 1998)

Kastan, K. & Banfield, S., Women’s Hearts’ All Heart Family Cookbook. (Rodale, NY, 2008)

Introduction

Your heart surgery is over. Now you and your family can focus on your recovery.

Heart surgery puts stress on your entire body. At first, your recovery may seem slow. It is normal to feel more tired than usual. Increase your activity level slowly. Listen to your body and use common sense.

Your recovery time will depend on:

• your age
• your general health
• how active you were before surgery
• how you manage your health after surgery

It is normal to feel unsure about what you can do to help your recovery.

This booklet will help you with your progress. It answers the questions most often asked by our heart surgery patients and their families. This information will apply to you no matter what type of heart surgery you have had.

You can also learn more by visiting our hospital website:

Be Active After Heart Surgery
http://www.patienteducation.ca

At this website, you can learn how to be active while recovering after heart surgery.
Before you go home

What can I do to prepare for my discharge?

You may be ready to go home as soon as 4 days after your surgery. However, you might need to stay longer for medical reasons. Hospital staff will tell you the day before that you will probably be discharged the next day. Hospital staff will confirm your discharge on the day you can leave.

Do these things before you leave the hospital:

- **Watch the discharge video and read this booklet.** They will help you learn important information about your discharge.

- **Attend the information sessions.** Look on your room door for the list of classes and times. These sessions will help you learn about things like health eating and exercise after surgery.

- **Arrange for a family member or a friend to help you for the first few days you are home.** You will need someone to help you with cooking, grocery shopping and cleaning.

- **Arrange for someone to drive you home.** Ask a family member or friend to pick you up before 11 AM on the day you leave. If your trip home is long, stop every hour or so to take a short walk.

- **Tell hospital staff if you are flying home.** You may need medical clearance to fly and help at the airport.

- **Wear loose, comfortable clothing.** If the weather is cold, make sure your head and neck are covered.

- **Take some pain medicine before you leave the hospital.** This will help you feel more comfortable on your way home.

If you are taking Warfarin (a blood thinner), make sure you have received and understand the information about how your Warfarin will be monitored (INR blood testing).

### Helpful books and websites

#### General Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Names</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Brian Baker &amp; Dr. Paul Dorian, <em>A Change of Heart: Recovery from Heart Disease – In Body and Mind.</em> (Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation of Canada, 1998)</td>
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#### Women and Heart Disease

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Book Names</th>
<th>Description</th>
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### Stop-Smoking Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contacts</th>
<th>Address/Contact</th>
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</table>
| The Lung Association | Phone: (416) 696-9240  
Website: http://www.lung.ca |
| Smoke Enders     | Phone: 1-800-828-4357  
Website: http://www.smokenders.com/ |
| Canadian Cancer Society | Phone: 1-800-268-8874  
Website: http://www.cancer.ca |

### Stress Management/Relaxation

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<th>Contacts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ontario Psychological Association Referral Service</td>
<td>Phone: (416) 961-0069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy Madgett Relaxation Clinic</td>
<td>Phone: (416) 340-7070</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ask your hospital team or a family doctor for a referral to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker.

You will also need a written referral if you would like to use the relaxation clinic.

### Time of discharge

Please arrange to leave the hospital by 11 a.m. on your day of discharge. This will help us prepare for new cardiac patients. Thank you for cooperating with this discharge time.

If you cannot leave by 11 a.m., we may ask you to wait in the patient lounge until your family or friends come to take you home.

### Make sure you have these things before you leave the hospital:

- **A discharge letter for you and a copy for your family doctor.**
- **Prescriptions for your medicine.**
- **Information about the medicine you are taking.** This information includes:
  - Why you need to take them
  - How to take them
  - Common side effects
- **Your blue hospital card**
- **For valve and congenital heart disease patients: information about endocarditis prophylaxis.** This is information about the antibiotics you will take to prevent infection.
Right after you get home

What follow-up appointments will I have after surgery?

Following up with all your doctors is important after surgery. You will need to make the following appointments after your discharge:

1. **Family doctor or primary care nurse practitioner:**

   See your family doctor during the first week you are at home. Make an appointment as soon as you get home. This will let him/her see how you are feeling. It will be important for measuring your progress at future visits.

   If you have any problems, your family doctor or nurse practitioner will help. They can also refer you to your surgeon or cardiologist.

2. **Cardiologist:**

   See your cardiologist about 4 weeks after surgery. Call the first week you are home to make your appointment. If you have a cardiologist at the Toronto Centre for Adult Congenital Heart Disease, the clinic will call you with an appointment.

3. **Surgeon:**

   See your surgeon about 6 to 8 weeks after surgery. Call your surgeon’s office to make an appointment. The number to call will be on your discharge letter.

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**Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario**

**Contacts**

Address: 1920 Yonge St. 4th Fl, Toronto ON M4S 3E2
Phone: 416-489-7111
Website: http://www.heartandstroke.on.ca/

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario can give you a lot of information about heart disease and stroke. You can call them to receive a booklet that lists all of the information available.

Some of the information you can receive includes:

- reducing risk factors for heart disease
- medical information about angina, heart valves and high cholesterol
- coping with stress
- healthy heart eating
- reading food labels

You can also ask them about the Heart to Heart program, which provides education and support.

**Medic-Alert Bracelet**

**Contacts**

Address: 250 Ferrand Dr., Toronto ON M4C 3G8
Phone: (416) 696-0267

Blood thinner, pacemaker
A registered dietitian (RD) can help you set up a diet of nutritional foods that will help you during your recovery.

You can ask your cardiologist or family doctor to send a referral form to see an out-patient cardiac dietitian from UHN. Ask your doctor to include your medical history and results from recent blood work on the form.

Call your family doctor if you any of the symptoms below. Do not wait until a scheduled appointment.

- Have a fever higher than 38°C (100.4°F) for 2 to 3 days.
- Have thick, yellow-green (pus-like) drainage from any incision or chest tube site.
- Gain 2 to 3 pounds (1 to 1.5 kg) of weight over 2 to 3 days. This may be a sign that you are retaining fluid.
- Have swelling in both your ankles. This may also be a sign that you are retaining fluid.
- Feel increasing shortness of breath after activity or at rest.
- Have a feeling that your heart is beating faster than it did early after your surgery.
- Feel pounding in your chest more often than it did early after your surgery.
- Feel your heart skipping a beat more often than it did early after your surgery.
- Have a sharp pain in your chest. It becomes worse when you take a deep breath. It is not relieved by pain medicine.
- Feel more tired over several days. You feel more tired than you have been feeling after surgery.
- Have angina or chest pain/discomfort like you had before surgery.
What should I know about my medicines?

Your doctor will give you prescriptions for medicine to take at home. The kind of medicines you take will depend on the type of surgery you had. It will also depend on your medical condition. Your medicines might be different from the ones you took before your surgery.

Before you go home, you should know the following information about each medicine you will take:

• What it is for
• How much to take
• When to take it
• How long to take it
• What side effects to watch for
• What to do if you have side effects

Your doctor might prescribe Warfarin (also called Coumadin) while you are in the hospital. Warfarin is a blood thinner. It is used to prevent blood clots and stroke. You or your family should attend the Warfarin education class before being discharged from hospital. At the class you will learn important information about how to use this medicine safely and what to expect when you go home.

Take the medicines you are prescribed until your first check-up with your family doctor. At this appointment, your family doctor will tell you which medicines you will continue to take.

Look at the chart on the following page for some important tips for taking your medicine.
Out-patient rehabilitation – Cardiac Rehabilitation

Out-patient rehabilitation is open to all cardiac patients. It is often called Cardiac Rehabilitation. It provides information about physical activity, nutrition, and lifestyle.

After your surgery, your family doctor or cardiologist will refer you to a program. There is a cardiac rehabilitation program at University Health Network (UHN) at the Toronto Western Hospital (TWH). You can also be referred to a program closer to your home. Most programs are covered by OHIP.

About 2 weeks after you return home, you will get a call from TWH staff. They will answer any questions you have and discuss your plans. During their call, you can arrange a time to visit the cardiac rehabilitation program or they can assist you in finding a program closer to where you live.

Cardiac rehabilitation programs can help you learn how to follow rules for a healthy lifestyle. These programs will teach you:

• how to plan a healthy menu
• how to cook low-fat foods
• how to exercise safely
• how to relax when you feel stress
• more about heart disease and how to reduce the effects of heart disease

During the program, you can share your experience with other patients who have had heart problems. The staff might also have you do an exercise test and design an exercise program just for you.

Studies show that patients who go to cardiac rehabilitation recover sooner and better than patients who do not go. At a cardiac rehabilitation program, you will learn a lot about how you can stay healthy after heart surgery.

For more information call the UHN cardiac rehabilitation department at Toronto Western Hospital 416-603-5268 or check the following websites:

www.patienteducation.ca
www.cardiachealth.ca
www.ccn.on.ca

Tips for taking your medicines

• Follow all of the instructions for taking each medicine. Your health care provider will give you this information.

• Keep an updated list of your medicines with you all the time. This list should include:
  o the name of the medicine
  o how many you take each day
  o what time you take them

You can also bring all of your medicines in their original bottles to all medical appointments.

• Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you:
  o take new prescription medicines
  o take non-prescription medicines
  o take herbal or vitamin products

• If you forget to take your medicine, skip the dose and take your medicine at the next scheduled time. Do not make up for it the next time by taking two.

• Return old or outdated medicines to your pharmacy. They will throw them away safely.

• Tell your doctor about any side effects of the medicines you are taking. These side effects can include:
  □ rash  □ vomiting
  □ fever  □ diarrhea
  □ nausea  □ yellowing of your skin
  □ severe bruising
How should I care for my incisions?

There are things you can do to help your incisions heal as quickly as possible. This will also help reduce your scarring.

- **Take a shower every day.** Wash your incisions gently with water and non-scented soap.
- **Do not take a bath in your tub until your incisions are well healed.** The dirt in bath water may allow infection to enter your incisions. This will take about 4 to 6 weeks after surgery.
- **Do not scrub your incisions.** Let the water run over your incisions to rinse off the soap.
- **If your chest is sensitive to the shower spray, turn your back to the showerhead.** Then move around so that the water runs over your shoulders onto your chest. If you find it too tiring to stand in the shower, sit on a sturdy stool or chair that is meant for the shower.
- **Avoid direct sunlight on your healing incision (and later the scar).** After 4 to 6 weeks you can use sunscreen to protect the scar tissue.
- **If you are a woman, wear a good support bra.** This will help prevent pulling on the incision. This will also help lessen discomfort. If your bra irritates your incision, put some gauze over the affected area.

Helpful community resources

**What community resources might be available to me?**

There are many different resources that can provide help or information during your recovery. Resources could be people or centres that help you physically or give you information. Resources could also be information in books or websites.

**Some examples of people or centres that can help are:**

- Rehabilitation centres
- Your local hospital
- Community Care Access Centres
- Registered Dietitians
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario
- Stop-smoking programs
- Stress management and relaxation programs

Information about each one of these resources is listed below.

**Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation uses physical therapy and education to help you recover from surgery. There are two kinds of rehabilitation, in-patient rehabilitation and out-patient rehabilitation.

**In-patient rehabilitation**

Most people recover very well at home and do not need in-patient rehabilitation. Some people need extra help with their recovery. In-patient rehabilitation means being admitted to a different health care centre after your hospital stay.

You will only be referred for in-patient rehabilitation if:

- you are elderly and live alone with no family or friends to help
- you had major complications after your surgery and you need ongoing medical care

Only a few patients qualify for rehabilitation beds so it is important that you prepare for your discharge early – even before you come to the hospital for surgery. Ask to speak to the social worker if you need help with your plans.
Life after recovery

No matter what kind of heart surgery you had, it is up to you to keep healthy. After surgery, you may need to make some changes in your lifestyle to improve your health.

Make these changes one day at a time, so you do not feel overwhelmed. Making heart-healthy choices is important to stay healthy after your surgery and recovery.

For bypass patients, it is important to change your risk factors for coronary artery disease. Risk factors are things that increase the chance that you will develop coronary artery disease. Coronary artery disease can still progress after surgery.

Changing your risk factors will reduce this possibility. Some risk factors we cannot change. These include family history (heredity), age, and gender (whether you are a man or a woman). Other risk factors can be changed. These risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- Stress
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes

To decrease your risk factors and help you stay healthy:

- Avoid smoking or second-hand smoke.
- Keep a healthy weight for your height.
- Eat a healthy diet. For example follow “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide” (http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide). See a Registered Dietitian to help you with your eating plan.
- Exercise regularly.
- Look at ways to reduce stress.
- Monitor other health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- Take your medicines as prescribed.
- Keep appointments with your doctors to help monitor your health.

Decide to learn more about your condition. Make some choices to improve your health!

If you have any questions about your heart problems or risk factors for heart disease, ask a health care professional.

Healing at home

How can I expect to feel as I recover from surgery?

After heart surgery, you will have some discomfort as you heal. These feelings of discomfort are normal and will decrease over time.

You will recover from heart surgery at your own pace. In time, you will be able to go back to your regular daily activity.

Here are some charts with some helpful information. They list some common feelings you might have in your body and what you can do that will help.

Your whole body

What you might feel:

- Weakness and fatigue
- Nausea
- Lack of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Stiffness
- Tingling or numbness in your ring or pinky fingers
- Discomfort, soreness and aching in these areas:
  - around your incisions and ribcage
  - between your shoulder blades
  - at the back of your neck
  - in your legs
**What you can do to help:**

- Be patient. Your energy level, concentration, and appetite will improve as you heal.
- Increase your activity very gradually. Your body will give you signs that you are doing too much too soon.
- Take pain medicine to ease your discomfort.
- The tingling or numbness in your fingers will disappear in time. The nerves in your arm were stretched when your chest was opened during surgery.
- Change positions often (sitting, standing, walking, lying down).
- Try to sit or stand with your back straight.
- Make sure you get enough exercise. Follow the activity guidelines on page 16.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about how you feel.

**Your heart beat**

**What you might feel:**

- Your heart beating faster than usual
- Sometimes, a pounding feeling in your chest
- Sometimes, your heart skipping a beat

**What you can do to help:**

- Understand that your heart will go through some changes as it heals.
- Stop and rest if your heart feels like it is beating too fast.
- Talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner if you feel like your heart is beating too fast, too often.
- Follow the activity guidelines on page 16.

**When can I go back to work?**

Your body will recover in its own time. When you start feeling better, you might start thinking about when you can go back to work.

Even if you are feeling better, when you should return to work will depend on the kind of job you have. Your body might need to be fully recovered before you can go back to work.

You might have to wait a little longer before going back to work if your job:

- is very stressful (for example: long hours and many deadlines)
- needs you to do a lot of heavy lifting or pushing
- needs you to work in a dangerous or risky environment

Talk to your cardiologist when you see him or her at your scheduled appointment (4 to 6 weeks after surgery). Tell them about the details of your job. Your cardiologist can give you some advice about when is the best time to return to work.
Can I drink alcohol?

During your recovery a moderate amount of alcohol is allowed. A moderate amount means 1 or 2 drinks per day at the most. One drink is equal to:

| One bottle of beer  | One 5 ounce glass of wine | One shot (1½ ounces) of liquor |

You should talk to your doctor or someone on your healthcare team before you drink more than these amounts. Alcohol can change the way some of your medicine, like Warfarin, works. Alcohol can also affect the level of triglycerides (fat) in your blood, your blood pressure, and your blood sugar.

Your breast bone

**What you might feel:**

- A slight clicking or movement of your breastbone when you move or take deep breaths

**What you can do to help:**

- Understand that this feeling will disappear in about 4 weeks as your breastbone heals.
- Lift, carry, push or pull only items less than 10 pounds (4.5 kg) for 6 weeks after your surgery. Let someone else help you with lifting or tiring work.

Your legs – for bypass patients

**What you might feel or see:**

- Swelling in your leg. The swelling will be worse around the foot and ankle area where the vein was removed.

**What you can do to help:**

- Understand that this will improve. The other veins in your leg will build up to take over for the one that was removed.
- Raise your legs above your hips when you are sitting or lying down.
- Do not cross your legs when you sit.
- Avoid standing in one position for a long time.
### Your incisions

**What you might feel or see:**
- Slight redness, swelling, or bruising around your incision
- Swelling or a lump at the top of the chest incision
- A feeling of numbness or burning around your chest area. This might be caused by damage to nerves during surgery
- Itching and burning on or around your incisions

**What you can do to help:**
- Understand that your redness, swelling and bruising will eventually disappear. The lump will disappear in a few weeks.
- Use a clean, cool cloth on your incision to help relieve itching and burning.
- Wash your incisions with mild soap and water.
- Do not put creams, lotions, ointments or powder on your incisions for the first few weeks.
- Watch out for signs of infection.

### Eat more fibre

- Eat more whole grain breads and cereals
- Eat as many fruits and vegetables you can each day
- Eat more beans and lentils

### Eat foods that are low in salt

- Do not eat pre-packaged or ready made foods. They are usually very high in salt. Avoid foods like:
  - luncheon or deli meats
  - canned foods
  - frozen prepared dinners
  - pickled or smoked foods
  - salty snack foods
  - fast food
- Use less salt in cooking and do not salt your food at the table.

### Your bowel movements

**What you might feel:**
- Constipated
- Bloating in your abdomen caused by:
  - the anesthetic you were given
  - the medicines you are taking

**What you can do to help:**
- Eat lots of high fibre foods like fruit and vegetables.
- Talk to your pharmacist or family doctor if you need medicine to help you empty your bowels.

### Talk to a registered dietician (RD) if you:

- have diabetes
- have high blood pressure
- are overweight
- have high blood sugar after surgery
- have congestive heart failure

If you have any of these conditions, an RD can give you important information about what you should and should not eat. Your cardiologist, family doctor or the UHN team can give you a referral to see a dietician.
Reduce how much cholesterol you eat.
Cholesterol is a type of fat in your body. It is also in some foods.

• Eat 2 or less egg yolks per week
• Eat less shrimp, squid, and organ meats

Eat foods that are low in sugar
Candies and other sweets are usually high in calories and low in nutrients.

Choose lean cuts of meat, fish, and chicken

• At one meal, your meat portion should be the size of a deck of cards.
• Before cooking, cut off any fat you see from red meat and take the skin off chicken.
• Put meat on a rack when cooking. This lets the fat drain off.
• Eat fish more often. It has omega-3 fatty acids, which can lower your risk of heart disease. Try to have 2 to 3 servings per week.

Some examples of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids are:
  □ salmon
  □ trout
  □ mackerel
  □ herring
  □ sardines

Instead of meat, choose proteins like beans, lentils and tofu
These are good sources of protein, fibre and low in fat.

Your sleep

What you might feel:
• Stiffness when you are moving or turning.
• You are waking up often in the middle of the night
• You wake up feeling tired

What you can do to help:
• Understand that your sleep should improve as you recover.
• Use enough pillows to make yourself comfortable.
• Stay active during the day by following the guidelines on page 16.
• Fit in rest periods between your activity.
• Take pain medicine before you go to bed.

What positions you should sleep in:
• It is okay to sleep on your sides.
• Do not sleep on your stomach for the first 4 to 5 weeks.
How can I cope with my changing emotions?

While you recover from your heart surgery, you might feel a lot of different emotions. Your emotions can sometimes match how your body is feeling. The changes to your daily routines can also affect your emotions.

You might not have any trouble with your emotions after surgery. If you do have some trouble, this is common. Your body is going through a lot of changes. You might find some days more difficult than others.

Here are some examples of how you might feel on some days:

- sad or depressed
- frustrated
- impatient
- afraid
- irritated
- happy one minute and sad the next
- angry at friends and family for minor reasons

It is common to have trouble sleeping at the beginning of your recovery. You might also find it more difficult to concentrate and remember things.

Remember that these emotions are temporary. Your emotions will improve as you feel less pain. They will improve as your energy increases. They will improve as you start to do your normal daily activities.

Try to be patient. Do not expect too much of yourself in the first few weeks. Compare your progress week-by-week and not day-by-day.

Remember that family members and friends can help. Tell them how you are feeling. Your family and friends will understand. They may also be feeling all kinds of emotions about your surgery and recovery.

Honestly talking about your feelings can help you and your family cope with your changing emotions.

The chart below has some suggestions for healthy heart eating during and after your recovery. This information is from a resource called “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide”.

### Eat a balanced diet

- Eat a variety of foods from the five food groups
  - vegetables and fruit
  - grain products (breads and cereals)
  - milk and milk products
  - meat and other proteins
  - oils and fats
- From these groups of foods, eat mostly vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and unsaturated fats

### Keep a normal body weight for your height

Balance how much you eat with how much you exercise.

### Use the right amount and right kinds of fats

- Eat or use unsaturated fats. Some examples of unsaturated fats are:
  - olive oil
  - canola oil
  - non-hydrogenated margarine
- Do not eat saturated fats. They are not healthy for your heart. Some examples of saturated fats are:
  - butter
  - lard
  - palm oil
  - trans fat (found in things like shortening)
- Read food labels to see what kind of fat is in the product you are buying
Should I have visitors?

Visits from relatives and friends can be enjoyable but tiring. Try to limit the number of visitors to no more than 2 a day at first. Don’t be afraid to tell them when you begin to feel tired and need to rest. They will understand.

What about sex?

You and your partner may have questions and concerns about having sex after heart surgery. You might find that you sex drive is lower at the beginning of your recovery. Do not let this worry you. It is usually temporary.

Remember to be patient and to talk with your partner about your feelings. During the recovery period, hugging and kissing can be an enjoyable way to bring you and your partner closer together.

Avoid having sex after a large meal or a lot of physical exercise. If you are tired or tense, wait until you feel better before having sex.

Avoid taking the weight of your body on your arms for at least 6 weeks after surgery. If certain positions cause discomfort, try different ones. The positions that will cause the least stress on your body are lying on your side or lying on your back.

How should I eat to keep my heart and body healthy?

It is important to eat healthy foods during your recovery. Your body will need more nutrients and healthy proteins to help it heal.

You may find that you do not feel as hungry after surgery. This will improve as you begin to feel better. You might find it easier to eat 4 or 5 small meals or snacks during the day instead of 3 larger meals. Drinking a nutritional supplement may help you get the calories you need.

You should not try to lose weight during your recovery period. Later in your recovery, a registered dietician (RD) can help you set up your healthy weight goals.

Remember: eating healthy foods will speed your healing and lessen fatigue.

How active can I be during my recovery?

Now that you have returned home, you will have to be less active for a while. This will give your body a chance to heal. It is important that you do not strain your sternum (chest bone). Gradually increase your activity so you do not become too tired.

Below is some information about what activities you can do and when you can start doing them. Remember to watch how you are feeling. Stop if you feel pain while you are doing an activity. Pain is one of your body’s signs that something may be wrong.

1 to 6 weeks after surgery – light activities

You will see your family doctor during the first week you return home. Ask your doctor if it is ok before you do any of the following activities.

- Walking and climbing the stairs at a slow pace
- Lifting items that weigh less than 10 pounds (4.5 kg)
- Washing your hands and body
- Combing your hair while sitting or standing at the sink
- Showering with warm water while sitting or standing in the shower
- Dressing and undressing
- Preparing light meals. For example: chopping salad while sitting.
- Washing the dishes, making the bed and doing light housekeeping such as dusting

Remember: Do not reach above your shoulders too often or for too long

6 to 8 weeks after surgery – moderate activities

You will see your cardiologist 4 weeks after you return home. Ask your cardiologist if it is ok before you do any of the following activities.

- Hanging laundry on the line to dry
- Cleaning at a slow pace. For example: vacuuming, washing floors, laundry
- Shopping for groceries and carrying bags
- Doing light home repairs. For example: hanging a small picture
### 8 weeks after surgery – heavy activities

You will see your surgeon about 8 weeks after you return home. Ask your surgeon if it is ok before you do any of the following activities.

- Shovelling snow
- Doing heavy washing or scrubbing with your arms above your shoulders
- Doing heavy gardening. For example: digging, spading, raking, trimming branches overhead
- Playing tennis, swimming, or bicycling at a medium or fast pace
- Doing heavy home repairs. For example: painting a room

### How should I change the way I do my daily activities?

You should change the way you do your daily activities while you recover. Finding an easier or simpler way to do a task will save you energy. Doing a task differently will also help you avoid feeling pain.

The tips below will help you save energy. Saving energy does not mean doing less. It means using the energy you have wisely.

No matter what activity you are doing, you should:

1. **Balance activity with rest periods.**
   
   Do an activity for a short time, then rest for a short time. **Take a rest even if you do not feel tired.** Take a nap or rest whenever you feel tired. Rest for at least 30 to 60 minutes, twice a day during the start of your recovery.

2. **Take your time during activities.**
   
   Doing things more quickly uses up more energy. It can also increase your level of stress. Do things at a slow and steady pace.

3. **Change your body position to save energy.**
   
   Your body position can affect how hard your heart has to work. You can save energy by sitting while you do some activities. Change your position often. Don’t sit or stand for too long.

4. **Changing position often will help keep you from feeling stiff and improve your blood flow.**

### Comparing your resting pulse with your exercise pulse

It is important to know what your resting pulse is. Your resting pulse is your pulse **before** you exercise or do an activity.

It is important to know this rate so you can compare it to your exercise pulse. This is your pulse **during or right after** you exercise.

**Resting Pulse** (your heart rate **before** exercise)

- A normal resting pulse is 10 to 16 beats per 10 seconds or 60 to 100 beats per minute.
- **You should exercise very slowly** if you resting pulse is more than 20 beats per 10 seconds or 120 beats per minute.

**Exercise Pulse** (your heart rate **during and after** exercise)

- **Your exercise pulse should not be more than 4 beats per 10 seconds above your resting pulse** for the first 4 to 6 weeks after surgery.
- **Your exercise pulse should not be more than 20 beats per 10 seconds or 120 beats per minute** for the first 4 to 6 weeks after surgery.

### Can I climb stairs?

You can climb stairs when you need to. In the first 2 weeks at home, try to limit going up and down the stairs to 3 or 4 times a day. Do not climb stairs as part of your exercise.

Climb slowly, one step at a time. Use the handrail for support. If you become tired or dizzy, stop and rest for a minute.

When you reach the top of the stairs, you may feel short of breath or feel your heart pounding. You will feel better after you stop and rest. You will also improve as you continue to recover.

If you find that climbing the stairs is hard for you, put a chair near the top. You can rest on the chair if you need to sit down before walking further.
7. **Use the walk/talk test**
   You should be able to walk and talk at the same time without feeling short of breath.

8. **Stop if you feel:**
   - pain
   - upset stomach
   - very tired
   - short of breath
   - dizzy or lightheaded
   - your heart pounding or beating very fast

9. **Check your pulse**
   Checking your pulse (heart rate) is a good way to see how hard your heart is working. To exercise safely, your pulse after exercise should be no more than 20 beats per minute higher than before exercise.

### Checking Your Pulse

Here are some instructions for how to check your pulse. If you are not sure you are doing it right, your nurse or physiotherapist can help you learn how to do it.

1. **Use these two fingers to feel your pulse.**
   Do not use your thumb.

2. **Lightly press your two fingers just above the skin creases on the thumb side of your wrist.**

3. **Count the number of beats you feel in 10 seconds. The number of beats that you count is your pulse rate. To find out what your pulse rate is per minute, multiply your number by 6.**

   For example, if you counted 12 beats, then your pulse is 12 beats per 10 seconds or 72 beats per minute.

   If you like, you can buy special monitors to take your pulse for you. Some examples are a watch monitor, a step counter, or a heart rate monitor.

On this page are some examples of how you can do common daily tasks in a different way to save energy and avoid pain.

### Kitchen Tasks

- Put the things you use most often on a level that is easy to reach. You should not bend or reach your arms above your shoulders.
- If you need to, use tools like a “reacher” to help you. It can be used to pick up things that are on high shelves or that fall to the floor.
- Let any dishes you wash air dry instead of drying them.
- Only carry things that are less than 10 pounds (4.5 kg).
- Hold or carry things like pots or bowls with both hands.
- Hold or carry things close to your body. This will spread the weight across more muscles.
- If possible, slide things across the countertop (for example hot pots).

### Bathing

- When you shower, sit on a bath chair or bath bench. You will use less energy.
- Using a hand-held showerhead may help you reach all of your body parts.
- Once you can take a bath (after 4 to 6 weeks), do not use extremely hot water. This may cause you to feel weak or dizzy.
- Use a grab bar in your tub if you have trouble moving around. An Occupational Therapist (OT) can tell you the best place to install the grab bars for your safety.
Toilet
If you have difficulty getting on and off the toilet, it is usually because the toilet seat is too low. You may need a raised toilet seat to increase the height of the seat. If you need something to hold onto, you can install a wall grab bar or side rails for the toilet.

Lifting things from the floor (less than 10 pounds)
1. Bring your body close to what you want to lift.
2. Bend your knees and hold it close to your body.
3. Lift with your legs, not with your arms and back.

Remember:
• Avoid driving for at least 4 weeks after surgery. Your reaction time will be slow because of the medicine you are taking. You will also feel weaker and more tired.
• Do not use saunas and hot tubs for at least 6 weeks. They can cause your blood vessels to dilate and will make you feel lightheaded (dizzy). Talk to your family doctor before you use either.

Week 4 at home
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Number of walks each day</th>
<th>Length of time walking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow these rules when you exercise:
1. Always warm-up before exercising and cool down after exercising.
   To warm-up or cool down, do a few minutes of slow walking. This will let your heart rate slowly increase before you exercise and slowly decrease after you exercise.
   Your warm up and cool down can also include a few stretches. This will help loosen up your muscles.
2. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and comfortable walking or running shoes.
3. Wait 2 hours before you exercise:
   • after a large meal
   • drinking alcohol
   • after drinking coffee, tea or cola (things with caffeine)
4. Add new exercises or activities slowly.
   If you feel tired or sore the day after you exercise, you may be pushing yourself too hard.
5. Avoid outside activities in very hot or very cold weather.
   Very hot or very cold weather can be hard on your heart. Do not exercise outside when the temperature is lower than -8°C or higher than 27°C. Also, do not exercise if the humidity makes it feel higher than 39°C.
6. Do not hold your breath during exercise.
   Remember to breathe in and out. If you are doing something that takes effort, remember to breathe out while you do the task.
Week 1 at home

**Slow pace:** for example, walking slowly in a park (about 3 km per hour)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Number of walks each day</th>
<th>Length of time walking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 to 9</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 to 8</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 to 6</td>
<td>7 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 to 6</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>9 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>11 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Week 2 at home

**Slow pace**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Number of walks each day</th>
<th>Length of time walking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>13 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Week 3 at home

**Moderate pace:** (about 5 km per hour)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Number of walks each day</th>
<th>Length of time walking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What exercises will help me get better when I get home?**

When you get home from the hospital, you should follow the same routine as you did in the hospital. For example, eat three meals a day, go for short walks, do your incentive spirometry and take periods of rest as required. **Be sure to listen to your body and balance your activities.**

Your daily activities should include self-care activities like washing and dressing. Go to page 16 for a reminder of which self-care activities you can do during your recovery.

Besides self-care activities, there are exercises you must do to help you feel better. These exercises will help your recovery. These exercises include:

- **Deep breathing and coughing exercises**
  These exercises will help your lungs return to normal, especially during the first few weeks.

- **Simple stretching exercises**
  Stretching will help you feel less stiff and improve your flexibility.

- **Walking**
  Walking is a good way to exercise after your heart surgery. You do not need special equipment for walking. You can increase how much you walk as you feel better.

The next few pages explain how to do each of these exercises. The information also tells you how often to do these exercises.
Deep breathing and coughing exercises
Each of these deep breathing and coughing exercises should be completed 3 to 4 times daily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breathing with an Incentive Spirometer</th>
<th>How?</th>
<th>How often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Breathe in deeply to move the ball to the top.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Keep the ball at the top for 3 seconds.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Breathe out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Breathing exercises**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How?</th>
<th>How often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Relax your shoulders.</td>
<td>10 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Put your hand on your stomach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Breathe in while pushing out your stomach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hold your breath for 3 seconds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Breathe out slowly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Walking

Walking is a good activity for people who have had heart surgery. At the beginning of your recovery you should walk at a slow pace. As you start to feel better, you can do more.

If you are not able to walk outside because of bad weather, walk in the house. You can also walk inside a nearby shopping mall. If you live in an apartment building, walk through the hallways.

You can use a treadmill on the level setting at an easy walking pace (2mph or 3.2 kmph) or even a stationary bike with minimum resistance (at the lowest setting).

When you start walking, you should start with many short walks. Gradually, you will take fewer, but longer walks.

**To be safe when you walk, remember to:**

- Stop if you feel pain or feel unwell.
- Do not push yourself too hard. Your pulse (heart rate) during and after walking should not be more than 20 beats per minute faster than your resting heart rate for the first 4 weeks after surgery. After that, progress following your cardiac rehabilitation program staff’s advice.

Look on page 29 to learn how to take your pulse.

Below are some charts that give you examples of how fast and how often you should walk. There are charts for each of the first 4 weeks you are home. Remember to always listen to your body. Take your heart rate so you can exercise safely.
### Reverse curl

**How?**

1. Sit in a chair and bend your back over your knees.
2. Slowly straighten up.
3. As you straighten, pull your shoulder blades together and tighten your tummy.
4. Hold for 15 seconds.
5. Repeat.

**How often?**

- Do 5 stretches.
- Repeat 2 to 3 times a day.

### Leg straightening

**How?**

1. Sit all the way back on a chair.
2. Straighten your right leg.
3. Pump your ankle up, down, and around.
4. Relax (your leg back down?)
5. Switch legs and repeat.

**How often?**

- Do 5 stretches.
- Repeat 2 to 3 times a day.

### Splinted Cough

**How?**

1. Put a pillow tightly against your incision.
2. Cough twice in a row.
3. Rest before you repeat.

**How often?**

- 3 times

### Ankle Pumping

**How?**

1. Lie on you back or sit on a chair.
2. Bend your feet up and down.

**How often?**

- 10 times

### Leg slides

**How?**

1. Lie on your back.
2. Slide legs up and down, bending your knees.
3. Repeat one leg at a time, with your heel slightly off the bed.

**How often?**

- 5 to 10 times
Simple stretching exercises

Below are some simple stretches you should do while you recover. You should do these stretches every day for 2 to 3 weeks following your surgery.

After the first 2 to 3 weeks, you can also include these stretches as part of your warm-up (before exercise) and cool-down (after exercise).

You can do these stretches while sitting in a chair. Remember:

• Repeat each stretch 5 repetitions 2 to 3 times a day
• Stretches should be gentle, slow and steady. Be careful not to over stretch.
  None of these stretches should hurt you.
• Hold each stretch for about 10 to 15 seconds.

Neck stretch

How?
1. Slowly turn your head to look over your right shoulder.
2. Turn your head back to the centre.
3. Turn your head to look over your left shoulder.
4. Repeat.

How often?
Do 5 stretches.
Repeat 2 to 3 times a day.

Arms above head

How?
1. Move one arm straight out in front of you, shoulder height.
2. Slowly raise it above your head.
3. Lower it to shoulder level.
4. Repeat with the other arm.

How often?
Do 5 stretches.
Repeat 2 to 3 times a day.

Note: If you have a permanent pacemaker, be very careful with arm raises.

Trunk rotation

How?
1. Put your hands on your hips.
2. Slowly twist your head and upper body to look toward your left.
3. Start moving the same way to your right side.
4. Repeat.

How often?
Do 5 stretches.
Repeat 2 to 3 times a day.