

Daily Life Guidelines for Cardiology Patients

For patients returning home from hospital after heart surgery

Read this guide to learn:

- what activities you can do safely after surgery
- how to take your pulse
- how to conserve your energy
- how to cope with stress
- how to manage your risk factors for heart disease



I have just returned from the hospital. What kinds of activities can I do safely?

Once you get home, you may do all the things you did while in the hospital. Balance rest and activity. This is very important.

At first, it's better to take many short breaks instead of a few long ones. Don't do activities that cause you to strain or tense all your muscles at the same time.

Don't do these activities:

- ✗ carry heavy grocery bags
- ✗ lift anything over 20 pounds (10 kilograms)
- ✗ push or pulling anything heavy
- ✗ strain during a bowel movement
- ✗ try to open a stuck window
- ✗ try to open a stuck jar lid

While you are doing activities such as driving, cleaning, vacuuming, playing sports or lifting weights, watch for symptoms like:

- chest pain
- nausea (sick to your stomach)
- fatigue (feeling very tired)
- dizziness
- shortness of breath

When these symptoms happen, stop what you are doing. Tell your doctor about these symptoms right away.

Add more challenging activities slowly. For example, you should not lift anything over 20 pounds (10 kilograms) for 8 weeks. Try not to go up and down the stairs too often. Have someone else help you with these kinds of tasks for the first few weeks.

Read the charts below to learn what types of activities you can do as you heal.

Check with your doctor if you are unsure when to start an activity.

You can do these activities during week 1 at home

- Light hobbies. Some examples are reading, board games, knitting or playing the piano.
- Light housework such as dusting.
- Helping with only one thing at mealtime. For example, you can wash dishes for 1 meal and set the table for another.
- Watch a relaxing movie.
- Ride in a car for less than 15 minutes.
- Visit or have dinner with friends.
- Simple chores with the help of a friend. For example you can buy milk at the store.
- Wash yourself, shave, dress.
- Walking at a slow pace around the block.

Slowly build up your activity level. You will be able to do more activities after you have been home for a while.

You can do these activities during week 2 at home

- If you need to climb stairs, do so very slowly.
- Do light housework. Some examples are folding laundry, sweeping the floor, and making your bed.
- Prepare a light meal. For example, you can make a sandwich and soup.
- Slowly ride a stationary bike at the easiest setting.
- Walk at a slow to medium pace (about 1 kilometre in 10 to 11 minutes).

You can do these activities during weeks 3 and 4 at home

- Play more active games like bowling or billiards.
- Carry out light garbage 1 bag at a time.
- Do light loads of laundry and ironing.
- Light gardening. For example, you can pick small weeds.
- Wash the car.
- Walk at a medium to quick pace (about 1 kilometre in 8 to 9 minutes).

You can do these activities during weeks 5 and 6 at home

- Hobbies or sports like fishing, leisure skating, slow dancing, or golfing with a cart.
- Housework like changing bed sheets or minor house repairs.
- Driving your car for short distances (about 20 to 30 minutes).
- Riding in car for up to 1 hour.
- Walking at your regular speed (about 1 km in 7 minutes).
- Climbing stairs at your regular speed.

You can do these activities from week 8 onwards

- Hobbies or sports like cycling, jogging, swimming and tennis.
- Walking for 9 holes of golf or playing 18 holes using a cart.
- Grocery shopping.
- Taking care of your lawn. For example: power mowing, raking, pruning.
- Heavier house work like vacuuming, washing windows and cleaning the floor (using long handled tools).
- Lifting objects up to 20 pounds. Talk to your doctor before lifting heavier objects.
- Doing farm work after getting your doctor's permission.

Check your heart rate when doing new tasks. See page 46.

If your heart rate is beating fast, stop your activity and rest before continuing.

When can I return to work?

When you can return will depend on a few things. It will depend on the type of job you have. It will also depend on the reason you were in hospital.

Most cardiologists recommend that patients return to work within one month after discharge. Everyone's situation is different. Discuss your situation with your cardiologist.

When can I have sex again?

You can usually have sex within 7 to 10 days after returning home. If you feel comfortable climbing 2 flights of stairs, it is safe to have sex.

If you still feel tired or weak, remember: sex is not just intercourse. Touching, hugging and kissing are also ways of expressing caring.

Some drugs can affect your desire for sex. They can also affect your performance. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if this is the case.

Other things that can affect your desire for sex or sexual performance are:

- if you have just eaten a large meal
- if you have had some alcohol
- if you exercised a lot
- if you are feeling tired
- if you are feeling stress

When can I drive my car?

Talk to your cardiologist about this question. When you can drive may depend on your illness.

Check with your doctor if you had an **irregular heartbeat** when in hospital. This can affect when you can drive.

If you were admitted for **angina** or for a **heart attack**:

- you may start driving again in 4 weeks.

If you were admitted for **angioplasty**:

- you may start driving again in 2 days.

If you were admitted for **bypass or valve**:

- you may start driving again in 6 weeks.

When you start driving again, try to avoid things that might cause you stress.

For example, avoid things like:

- driving in rush hour traffic
- driving in bad weather
- driving at night
- driving at high speeds

When is it safe to travel by plane?

Usually, you can travel on a plane within 2 weeks after coming home from hospital. It is important for you to discuss this with your doctor. When you can travel by plane may depend on your illness.

Exercise

What kinds of exercise can I do when I get home from the hospital?

Adding exercise to your daily life can be hard at first. Be patient and get support from your family or friends. After a while, exercise will be a healthy and enjoyable part of your lifestyle.

There are 2 types of exercises you should do. One type of exercise is stretching. The other type is called cardiovascular exercise.

Read the sections below to learn about each type.

Stretching exercises

These exercises move your body in ways so that certain muscles are pulled or stretched. Stretching exercises warm up your muscles. You should stretch before you do any other type of exercise. This will help to prevent injuries.

It is important to stretch all your major muscle groups.

You will need to stretch your:

- neck
- shoulders
- arms
- legs
- back



Cardiovascular exercises

Cardiovascular exercises are exercises that raise your heart rate. Some examples of cardiovascular exercise are:

- walking
- cycling
- dancing
- swimming
- jogging



For most people, walking is the best exercise to do at first. In a few weeks, you can enjoy some of the other heart-healthy exercises. Check with your doctor about when to start these.



10 rules when you exercise or start a new activity

- 1. Listen to your body.**
- 2. When you walk, use the walk/talk test.** You should be able to walk and talk at the same time without feeling short of breath.
- 3. Check your pulse (how fast your heart is beating).** Your pulse will tell you how hard your heart is working. Someone on your health care team can teach you how to take your pulse.
Slow down or rest if your heart is beating at 120 beats per minute.
- 4. Wait 1 hour before you exercise:**
 - after a meal (this allows your food to be digested)
 - after drinking alcohol
 - after drinking coffee, tea, or cola (things with caffeine)
- 5. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and proper walking shoes.**
- 6. 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.
- 7. 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.
- 8. Do not take very hot baths or showers.** Taking a hot bath can affect the blood flow to different parts of your body.
- 9. Set some daily or weekly exercise or activity goals.** For example, decide to walk 3 times per day for 10 minutes each time. Setting goals can help you keep on track with your exercise. Feel proud and reward yourself when you reach your goals!
- 10. Take rests often and have fun!**

Check with your doctor or cardiologist before beginning any exercise program.

Talk to them if you have any questions or concerns about your progress.



Checking your pulse

How do I check my own pulse?

While you recover at home, you need to increase your activities gradually. Checking your pulse is a good way to tell how hard your heart is working.

Follow these three steps to check your pulse.

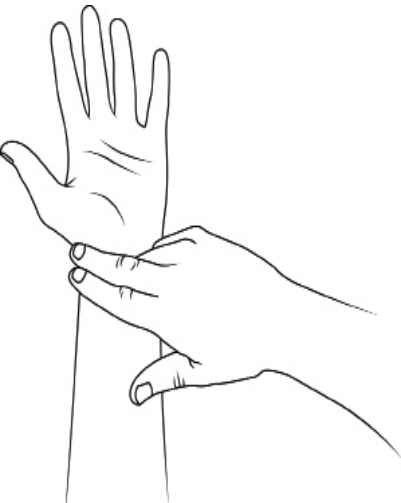
A member of your health care team can help you learn if this is new to you.



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

2. Lightly place 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 you count is your pulse rate. To find out what your pulse is per minute, multiply your number by 6.



You should check your pulse before, during and after you exercise.

This will help you know how much harder your heart is working during exercise.

Your resting pulse

When you are resting, your pulse can range from 10 to 16 beats per 10 seconds. This is equal to 60 to 100 beats per minute.

If your resting pulse is more than 20 beats per 10 seconds, exercise very slowly.

Your exercise pulse

Your pulse should not be more than 4 beats per 10 seconds above your resting heart rate. Exercise slowly for the first couple of weeks after surgery.

Check to make sure your exercise pulse does not beat faster than 20 beats per 10 seconds (120 beats per minute). If you find it hard to find your pulse, you can buy special monitors to take your heart rate.

How to save your energy

How can I change the way I do things to save my energy?

Right now, you might not be able to do the activities you usually do. You might feel tired or weak. You might find it hard to breathe or feel pain. Even if you do not feel any of these symptoms, your heart should not work too hard.

While you recover, you can do things that will help you save your energy. This is also called energy conservation. Energy conservation tips help you do things without feeling too tired. They also keep your heart from working too hard.

Saving energy does not mean doing less. It means using the energy that you have wisely. With practice, these tips can become habits. These new habits will help you do the things you enjoy safely.

Here are some energy saving tips



Do things at a slow and steady pace. This uses less energy.

- Divide an activity into steps and rest in between steps.
- Focus on one task at a time.
- Space activities out during your day.



Plan your activities. Planning helps keep you from getting too tired.

- Space out tasks evenly over a week.
 - Schedule rest periods into your day.
 - Alternate heavy and light tasks during the day
 - Plan ahead. Gather all of your supplies together before you do a task.
 - Understand that there might be some unexpected events.
You can not plan for everything.
- At first, you might not be able to do everything. Do only what you think is most important for you to do.
 - Write a list of tasks. Decide which tasks are important and which can wait.
 - Leave time for leisure activities. Doing things you enjoy will help you feel better.



Change your body position to save energy. Your body position can affect how hard your heart has to work.

- Work at tables that are at the right height. Try to keep your back straight.
- Use your knees to lift. Do not use your back.
- Avoid reaching and bending at the waist.
- Change your position from time to time. This will help your circulation (blood flow). It will also help to keep your muscles from feeling stiff.



Breathe deeply and try to relax. Stress causes your heart to work harder.

- Try deep breathing exercises.
- Avoid stress as much as possible.
- Try to get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night.

Stress and heart disease

How does stress affect heart disease?

People feel stress when they have challenging problems. You cannot avoid stress. But the way you cope with stress will change how it affects you.

Too much stress can negatively affect your heart disease. It can also negatively affect your recovery after being in hospital for treatment.

Stress affects people in many ways. Here are some examples of the ways that stress can affect your thoughts, emotions and body.

Stress and your thoughts

- You worry a lot
- You become forgetful
- You think about the same problem over and over

Stress and your emotions

- You feel fear and anxiety
- You feel depressed
- You have less patience
- You feel angry more easily
- You feel helpless

Stress and your body

- Your heart rate increases
- You breathe more heavily
- You have an upset stomach
- You have headaches
- You often feel tired or have problems sleeping
- You want to eat a lot more than usual or a lot less than usual
- You feel body aches and pains

Remember: There are ways you can cope with your stress.

How can I cope with stress?

Being in the hospital and getting ready to go home from the hospital are both stressful experiences. Some of the things that can help you to cope are:

- Remembering to breathe slowly and steadily
- Relaxation techniques
- Thinking about a good memory or about being in a peaceful place
- Thinking positively
- Finding the right balance between activity and rest
- Having fun. We all need positives in life to help cope with challenges.
- When you return home, make time to have fun.

Your family and friends can support you and help you to recover. Support from others has been shown to help patients with heart problems get better.

While you are recovering, you may not be as active as you used to be. Your family and friends will need to help for a number of weeks. Talking with your partner, children and friends will make this easier.

Reducing your risk of heart disease

How can I manage my heart disease risk factors?

You can do a lot to improve your health. You may have already changed some of your risk factors for heart disease.

Read the chart below to learn more what the risk factors are. You will also learn what you can do to reduce your own risk.

Ask your health care team for help in changing these risk factors.

Your cardiac dietitian will give you information about food that is healthy for your heart. They can also give you tips to help you change your diet.

Risk factor	What you can do to help
Smoking	Stop smoking. Your doctor can help you with a plan to stop smoking.
Eating a lot of fatty foods	Eat more vegetables and fruits. Eat fewer foods that are high in fat.
High blood pressure	Try to control your blood pressure.
Not getting enough exercise	Take a brisk walk (15 to 30 minutes). Do this 3 to 4 times per week.
Being overweight	Try to stay at a good body weight for your height and age.
Stress	Find healthy ways to cope with your stress. For example, try relaxation and breathing exercises.
High blood sugar	Talk to your doctor or endocrinologist (hormone specialist). They can give you advice on how to control your blood sugar.

This resource was written by:
Jeannine Costigan, RN, MScN, ACNP

Ruth Elias, MSc, RD

Janice Jickling, RN, MScN, ACNP

Min Hong, BSc. Pharm

Jane MacIver, RN, MScN

Heather Moon, BHSc OT

Nicki Morris, BHSc PT

Diane Neil-Pollinger, MSW, RSW

Peter Nielsen, RN, BScN, MN

Graham Reid, PhD

John Ross, MD, FRCP

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Rob Fuerte (APNE), 2014

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