

MY Program

Conscious breathing and light stretching can help you recover from heart surgery

Recovering from heart surgery challenges your body and mind.

Use this booklet to guide you through your recovery program each day.



To follow along with a few short videos, please visit:

- Belly Breathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPGI25SeCAs>
- Mobilizing Your Joints: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzG8KCH5v7c>
- Spinal Movements: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rVNfRCNzIY>
- Gratitude Practice: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkx1SwUsBOw>



After heart surgery it is normal to face:

- **Physical stress.** Pain and other effects of surgery can raise your blood pressure, heart rate and breathing. You may sweat and have tense muscles.
- **Mental stress.** You may feel anxious or depressed. You may have feelings of uncertainty or lack of control.

MY Recovery Program can help relieve stress and help you gain awareness of your body and breath. It combines relaxing breathing exercises with gentle movements and exercises that will benefit your body and mind.

The benefits you may receive from this program include:

- ✓ more mobility, flexibility and and balance
- ✓ more awareness of breath in your body
- ✓ reduced tension and the effects of stress
- ✓ more energy
- ✓ better and more restful sleep
- ✓ greater awareness of what is going on in your body and mind
- ✓ greater ability to focus your mind
- ✓ new appreciation of yourself and your life through the practice of gratitude

**Modified exercise
can help heal your
body, mind and spirit
after surgery**

While you were in the hospital, you began learning learning the MY Recovery Program. To get the full benefits of this program we recommend that you continue your practice at home.

**Modified
Exercise**

**= Gentle stretches and easy breathing
techniques that have been designed for
people who are recovering from heart surgery**

MY Recovery Program

My daily routine at home:

- Choose a firm chair with a fixed back and no wheels.

1 Breathe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take a moment to become aware of your breathing. Feel the sensation of air at the tip of your nostrils.• Feel the coolness of the air as you breath in.• Feel the warmth of the air as you breath out.• See page 4 for details on the belly breathing technique (diaphragmatic breathing)
Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPGI25SeCAs	
2 Warm up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move the joints of the body (see page 5 for details).• Start at your fingers and work your way up to your head and neck, and then all the way down to your feet and toes.
Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzG8KCH5v7c	
3 Rest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rest 1 to 2 minutes after warming up.• Notice the effects of moving all of the joints in your body.
4 Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spinal movements (see page 10 for pictures and details).• Arch and round the spine, leaning right and left, and twisting right and left.• Hold each pose for 3 to 5 breaths, or as long as feels comfortable.
Remember your A-B-C's:	
Awareness	Be aware of what your body is telling you as you go through the movements and poses.
Breathing	Remember to breathe during poses.
Capacity	Always work within your capacity. Don't strain yourself.
5 Gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set time aside daily to recall moments of gratitude• Repeat to yourself:<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ On your inhale: I am grateful for...□ On your exhale: Something that comes to mind.• See page 14 for journaling ideas and more information.
Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzG8KCH5v7c	

Belly Breathing Technique

(also called diaphragmatic breathing)

- Get as comfortable as possible by either sitting in a chair or lying down on a mat.
- Allow your eyes to close and the eyelids to soften.
- Breathe in and out through your nose. This is called nostril breathing and is our most relaxing form of breath.
- Take a few breaths and notice the coolness of the air as you breathe in and warmth of the air as you breathe out.

Getting ready

- Gently place either one or both hands over your belly area (just below the ribcage and above the belly button).
- Feel the weight of your hands on your belly (without pressing down).

Breathing in

- As you inhale through your nose, encourage your breath all the way down to your belly area, feeling a gentle rise under your hand(s).
- Imagine this happening, even if you're not able to do it the first few times.

Breathing out

- As you exhale, let your belly naturally deflate and fall away from your hands, emptying your belly completely of air.



Spend 3 to 5 minutes a few times a day doing this technique:

- before a nap or bedtime
- anytime you feel anxious
- when you feel like you need to slow down and rest.

Stop if you feel dizzy or light-headed.

Mobilizing (moving) your joints

Do these exercises if they feel good. Change or stop doing anything that feels too difficult.

Start by sitting in a comfortable chair or laying down on a mat.

- Begin moving your fingers for at least 1 minute and continue with each area of your body shown below (fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, knees, ankles and toes).

Fingers



- Wiggle each and every finger, noticing the movement and sensations.

Hands



- Open and close the hands, spreading the fingers wide and closing them into tight fists.

Wrists



- Circle at the wrists (in both directions) with hands and fingers relaxed.

Elbows



- Bend the elbows and straighten them, either down at your side or below shoulder height.
- If it feels too easy, imagine holding light weights in your hands.

Shoulders

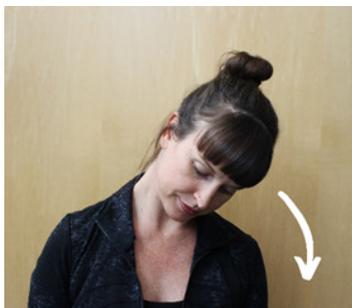


Circle both shoulders forward, up to your ears, back and down away from ears.

If your chest area feels weak after surgery:

- circle one shoulder at a time, placing one hand over your chest as the opposite shoulder circles in both directions.
- repeat circling on the other shoulder.

Neck



Drop one ear towards the same shoulder, stretching the opposite side of the neck.

Allow the chin to drop to the chest to stretch the back of the neck for a few breaths, and finish by bringing the opposite ear to shoulder.

Repeat in the opposite direction.

Knees



- Straighten one knee, by either lifting your foot off of the ground. If this movement feels uncomfortable, keep your heel on ground.
- Hold your leg straight for a few breaths, feeling the heat in the front of the thigh.
- Repeat using the other leg.

Ankles



- Circle one ankle in both directions a few times. Point the foot away from you and flex the toes towards you a few times.
- Repeat using the other ankle.

Toes



- Wiggle your toes, trying to spread the toes and move each one individually.
- Repeat using the other foot.

Moving your spine

- Sit in a chair with arm rests. Place your feet comfortably on the ground, hip distance apart.
- When you do this exercise slowly and mindfully, the 6 movements of the spine will help you feel more balanced in the body.

Begin by:

1. Rounding the spine (spinal flexion)



- Draw your chin to your chest, rounding the spine forward.
- Feel your breath in your back body.
- Hold this position for a few breaths in and out.

2. Arching the spine (spinal extension)



- Lift your chin and chest up, creating an arch in the back.
- If your chest feels weak, place one hand over the chest while you are in this pose.
- Hold this position for a few breaths in and out.

3. Leaning to the right (lateral flexion)



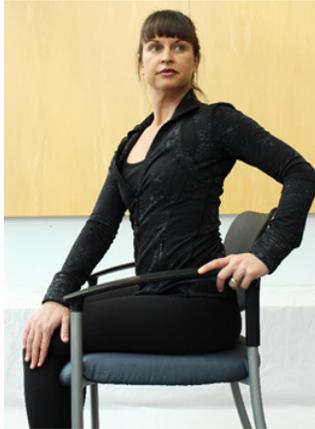
- Place your right forearm on the armrest, and your left hand on the armrest. Gently lean to the right, shortening the right side of the body, while lengthening the left.
- Hold this position for a few breaths, feeling the stretch on the left side of the body.
- Imagine that you can breathe more into the left side of the body.

4. Leaning to the left (lateral flexion)



- Place your left forearm on the armrest, and right hand on the armrest. Gently lean to the left, shortening the left side of the body, while lengthening the right.
- Hold this position for a few breaths, feeling the stretch on the right side of the body.
- Imagine that you can breathe more into the right side of your ribcage.

5. Twist to the right



- Twist to the right by place your left hand on your right thigh (or on the left thigh if that feels too difficult) and right hand on the arm rest.
- Sit tall and begin to twist to the right, looking over the right shoulder.
- Stay for a few breaths, getting taller with every inhale. Slightly deepen the twist with every exhale.

6. Twist to the left



- Twist to the left by placing your right hand on left thigh (or on the right thigh if that feels too difficult) and left hand on the arm rest.
- Sit tall and begin to twist to the left, looking over the left shoulder.
- Stay for a few breaths, getting taller with every inhale. Slightly deepen the twist with every exhale.

Practicing gratitude

What is gratitude?

Gratitude can mean appreciating things in your life. When we practice gratitude we thank ourselves, or we thank others. Thankfulness can have a healing effect on us.

Why practice gratitude?

Studies have shown that when we practice gratitude the level of stress hormone in our body (called cortisol) lowers. The body's cardiovascular system improved (the heart pumping oxygen and blood throughout the body). People were also better able to cope with emotions and negative experiences.

Our brains actually change when we express gratitude—our brain releases dopamine and serotonin (two important brain chemicals) in charge for our emotions that make us feel 'good'. They improve our mood right away, making us feel happy from the inside.

- ✓ Gratitude transforms difficult experiences into chances for growth.
- ✓ Gratitude helps us value the positive experiences in life.
- ✓ Gratitude reminds us of what is really important.
- ✓ Gratitude leads to greater happiness and optimism.
- ✓ Gratitude helps us to better handle stress.

How do I practice gratitude?

Set time aside every day to remember moments of gratitude.

Repeat to yourself:

- On your inhale: I am grateful for...
- On your exhale: Say something that comes to mind

Continue this for a few breaths, feeling like you can breathe in more gratitude with every inhale and release more gratitude on every exhale.

Start a gratitude journal and write down the following questions and answers:

- What challenges have I encountered today?
- How did they affect me?

Reflect by noticing:

- What has helped me deal with these challenges?
- What I am learning from them?
- How have people, situations or feelings assisted me?

Keeping a gratitude journal can help to reduce stress, improve the quality of sleep, and build emotional awareness.

To follow along with the video online, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rVNfRCNzIY>

More ways to manage stress

As well as doing **MY Recovery Program** each day, we encourage you to:

- Be active. Do some physical activity or exercise each day.
- Talk about your feelings and concerns with someone you trust.
- Become aware of your eating habits and focus on health eating.
- Manage one priority at a time.
- Cooperate rather than compete.
- Aim for a balance of work, play and relaxation.
- Examine your expectations to avoid creating your own stress.
- Learn to say “no”.
- Find the humour in every situation.
- Plan ahead and be organized.

Managing stress can be energizing and help you to appreciate your life with fresh awareness.

Living an active life after heart surgery

Always follow your heart surgeon’s advice about physical activity during your recovery.

When you have fully recovered, your cardiologist and/or primary health care provider can assess your readiness for more exercise.

Continue to practice mindful movements — it will improve your well-being!



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Form: D-8627 | Authors: Barbara Bailey, NP; Sharon McGonigle, NP; Dr. Arianne St.Jacques; Dr. Rima Styra; Revised: 03/2020 by Katelynn Corman and Sharon McGonigle | Reviewed: 2023