



What Can I Expect When I Go Home After Heart Surgery?

You might feel uncertain about going home after heart surgery. But you can feel assured that your health care team won't let you leave the hospital until they feel you're ready. Before discharge, they will give you instructions on how to care for yourself at home.

Each day, try to do a little more than you did the day before. Follow this simple formula: When rested, be active; when tired, rest. You can expect to improve a little more each day.



How can I improve my recovery time at home?

Recovery time is unique for each person. It will depend on the type of procedure you had, your health before surgery and any potential complications. For open heart surgery, it might take four to six weeks before you start feeling better.

Some important things for a healthy recovery include:

- Taking your medications as prescribed
- Following the physical activity instructions you were given
- Taking your temperature daily for one week. If it's over 100°F (38°C) two times within 24 hours, call your health care professional.
- Weighing yourself daily. If you gain more than two pounds a day for two days in a row, let your health care professional know.
- Following your wound care instructions. You can remove any butterfly bandages remaining after one week.

What should I expect while recovering at home?

When you get home from the hospital, you might have:

- **Reduced appetite** — It may take a few weeks for your appetite to return. Your sense of taste may be weaker, and certain smells might make you feel sick.

- **Swelling** — If you had coronary artery bypass surgery, you may have swelling in your leg where the vein was taken from for your bypass. Elevating your legs, doing exercises and wearing compression or support hose can help.
- **Trouble sleeping** — Falling or staying asleep might be hard at first. Taking your prescribed pain medication before bed and exercising during the day can help.
- **Constipation** — Drinking plenty of water, walking and eating fruits and vegetables can help. Your health care professional may also allow you to use stool softeners or laxatives.
- **Mood swings and sadness** — This is normal. As you heal, your mood should improve. Discuss any symptoms of anxiety or depression with your health care professional.
- **Lump at the incision** — A tender, pink or red lump is normal and will disappear with time. Contact your health care professional if you notice increased swelling, redness or pain.
- **Clicking noise in the chest** — This should happen less often and go away within a couple of weeks. If it worsens, contact your surgeon.
- **Muscle pain or tightness** — You might feel discomfort in your chest, shoulders and upper back. Pain medication can provide relief, but contact your surgeon or call 911 if the pain worsens.

(continued)



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Is there anything I should NOT do?

Your health care team will give you instructions on what not to do, but here is some general advice:

- **Sex** — You can have sex once you feel comfortable, unless advised otherwise by your health care professional. This is usually two to four weeks after leaving the hospital.
- **Driving** — Avoid driving, biking or riding motorcycles for six weeks. You can be a passenger in a car anytime. Take breaks to walk around every two hours during long car rides.
- **Lifting** — Don't strain your chest for six weeks. Avoid lifting, pulling or pushing anything over 10 pounds. Don't hold your breath during activities.
- **Reaching** — Don't do activities that require you to reach backward or put your arms above your shoulders for six weeks.
- **Work** — Check with your surgeon before going back to work. Most people feel ready for light work in six to 12 weeks.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at SupportNetwork.heart.org.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What kind of physical activity would be good for me?

How can I know what my weight should be?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.