






What To Do After Surgery

Sternal precautions following cardiac surgery

After your surgery, your provider will place you into 1 of 5 categories. Follow the 12-week activity orders throughout your recovery in order for your body to heal.		STERNOTOMY STANDARD	STERNOTOMY STRICT	THORACOTOMY STANDARD	THORACOTOMY STRICT	TRANSFEMORAL PROCEDURES
ARM MOVEMENTS						
	Keep your elbows tucked in at your side against your rib cage	Weeks #1 - 6	Weeks #1 - 12	Weeks #1 - 2	Weeks #1 - 4	No restrictions
	Begin side-to-side movements to extend your elbow at a 90-degree angle from your shoulder. This phase can be referred to as “walk like a chicken,” or a superhero stance	Weeks #1 - 6	Weeks #1 - 12	Weeks #1 - 2	Weeks #1 - 4	No restrictions
	Extend your elbows fully, making a “T” with your body. Begin raising your arm slightly, avoiding any movements that extend above your shoulders or head	Weeks #1 - 6	Weeks #1 - 12	Weeks #1 - 2	Weeks #1 - 4	No restrictions
	Extend your arms and shoulders behind your body, like you are reaching back to grab the arms of a chair before you sit down	After 6 weeks as tolerated	After 12 weeks as tolerated	After 2 weeks as tolerated	After 4 weeks as tolerated	No restrictions
	Begin to raise your arms above your head as tolerated, utilizing full range of motion in your shoulders	After 6 weeks as tolerated	After 12 weeks as tolerated	After 2 weeks as tolerated	After 4 weeks as tolerated	No restrictions
WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS						
Follow these restrictions when lifting, pushing or pulling anything with one or two arms						
Weeks #1 - 6		Less than 10 lbs	Less than 10 lbs	Less than 10 lbs for 2 weeks, then as tolerated	Less than 10 lbs for 4 weeks, then as tolerated	After 1 week as tolerated
Weeks #7 - 12		Less than 25 lbs	Less than 10 lbs			
Weeks #12 - 24		No restrictions	Less than 25 lbs			
BODY MOVEMENTS						
Hug or hold the heart pillow to help ease pain during movements or coughing		Weeks #1 - 6	Weeks #1 - 12	Weeks #1 - 2	Weeks #1 - 4	N/A
Support your body weight with your arms to minimize the amount of motion		After 6 weeks as tolerated	After 12 weeks as tolerated	After 2 weeks as tolerated	After 4 weeks as tolerated	As tolerated after discharged from hospital
Use your elbow to support your body when getting out of bed		After 6 weeks as tolerated	After 12 weeks as tolerated	After 2 weeks as tolerated	After 4 weeks as tolerated	As tolerated after discharged from hospital
Driving a vehicle (if no longer taking any narcotic pain medications)		After 6 weeks as tolerated	After 12 weeks as tolerated	After 2 weeks as tolerated	After 4 weeks as tolerated	After 1 week as tolerated

What You Can Expect as You Recover From Heart Surgery

Learn what you can (and shouldn't) do as you heal.

When you've have heart surgery, it's important to give your heart time to heal. You may be eager to start feeling "normal" again and getting back to doing the things you like to do, but you should listen to your body.

Pain is your guide in the recovery stage. If an activity causes pressure or pain, stop. Slowly return to the activity at a modified level to allow your body to recover and gain strength.

DAILY TASKS

Complete these tasks each day. If you have any concerns, contact your primary care physician.

- ☐ Shower daily to keep your wound clean. Thoroughly dry your wound afterward.
- ☐ Take medications as prescribed at the time of discharge from the hospital.
- ☐ Monitor your weight, blood pressure and any signs of infection.
- ☐ Eat a healthy diet. Nutritional foods will help your body in the healing process.



WOUND CARE

*Follow these guidelines to clean your wound daily. If your wound is opening, getting worse or not healing, call the surgical team immediately at **614-293-5502**.*

Cleaning

Clean your wound every day with your fingertips and antibacterial soap and water. You may need to adjust your shower to a gentle spray. Allow the water to gently run over your wound.

Avoid using harsh chemicals, like hydrogen peroxide, applying lotions or topicals, and scrubbing with washcloths, loofas or scrubbers for at least the first 12 weeks of recovery.

Drying

Dry the wound thoroughly after every shower, using a clean towel every time. Leave areas open with no bandage, unless the wound is actively draining or you were instructed by your provider at the time of discharge or at your clinic appointment.

DIET AND EXERCISE

Diet

During your recovery, maintain a heart-healthy diet. If you are diabetic, make sure to monitor your carbohydrate counts as well.

- Avoid soft drinks, coffee and tea due to caffeine content. Limit to one caffeinated beverage a day.
- Avoid beer, liquor and wine while taking pain medications.



Exercise

Movement and exercise are important during recovery to help your body get stronger. Exercise as your body allows.

- Attend cardiac rehabilitation two to three times a week, as instructed.
- No strength training or weightlifting until after 12 weeks, per your sternal precautions guide.
- Walk until you feel tired or fatigued, rather than setting a goal based on distance or time.



WHAT YOUR LOVED ONES SHOULD EXPECT

Healing takes time, and it will require a team effort. Collaborate with your loved one or caretaker and encourage him or her to take part in the healing process — take walks together or join your partner in eating healthy.

Adjusting to a serious health problem can cause depression or anxiety. Depression can make your cardiac rehab program more difficult, and it can affect your relationships and other areas of your life and health. If you get depressed, don't ignore it — contact your primary care physician.

For more information, visit wexnermedical.osu.edu/heart.



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