

DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS FOR HEART SURGERY

DIET:

It is important to eat well following your heart surgery; this will help with wound healing. If diabetic, sticking to a diabetic diet and controlling blood sugar is very important. Constipation is common and over the counter stool softeners and laxatives (such as Miralax, Milk of Magnesia, or Dulcolax) will be needed.

ACTIVITY:

After leaving the hospital it will take time for your incisions to heal. It takes 6-12 weeks for the sternum to heal. During this time you should not be pushing, pulling, lifting or carrying items heavier than 10 lbs. (example: one gallon of milk is 9 pounds). Most patients may resume driving 3-4 weeks after surgery. You should walk daily as much as you can; rest when needed. Unless restricted by your doctor, you may climb stairs. Avoid using your arms to pull yourself. You can ride as a passenger in a car at any time; you do not have to ride in the back seat and it is not advisable to disable air bags. You may begin cardiac rehab anytime as instructed by your cardiologist.

Stop any activity if you feel short of breath, notice irregular heartbeats, feel faint or dizzy, or if you have chest pain. Rest until symptoms subside. If they do not subside after 20 minutes, notify your doctor.

WOUND CARE:

Please shower daily and clean your incisions with soap and water only; do not put anything else on your incisions. If you begin to notice increased redness, drainage, or swelling at the incision sites, or if you begin running a fever, call my office. You may remove the "glue tape" dressing on your incision 2 weeks after surgery. If you experience increased swelling in the legs or feet, elevate your feet above the level of the heart several times a day. Call my office when you get home to schedule your postoperative follow-up appointment. Contact your cardiologist to make sure follow-up is arranged with them also.

MEDICATIONS:

After heart surgery, you will have pain. Some of this pain will be at the incision sites, other pain may come from the muscles around the rib cage. Please take your pain medication as prescribed. You may also use Tylenol and Ibuprofen with your prescribed pain medicines if you do not have kidney or liver problems. If you need a refill, please call your pharmacy at least 24 hours prior to running out of medication, so they may contact my office for refill authorization. If you have continued pain in the rib area, you may use a heating pad in that area, on medium heat for about 15-20 minutes, 4 times a day. Do not sleep with the heating pad on! Please know that if you are taking a blood thinner like Coumadin or Plavix, it is common to feel cold. Other than pain medication, if you need medication refills or have questions about your medications, call your cardiologist or primary care doctor.

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NOTE:

We DO NOT complete any disability paperwork. Please contact your PCP, cardiologist or pulmonologist for this purpose. We DO complete FMLA. There is a \$25.00 fee for completion of FMLA paperwork and we require a 7 day turn-around time for this.

It's Perfectly Normal to...

- **Not have much appetite or for food to taste different. It takes several weeks for this to return to normal. Some people feel nauseated at times or their sense of smell may be diminished.**
- **Have difficulty sleeping. You may find it difficult to fall asleep and you may frequently awaken during the night. This will improve! You may want to take your pain medication before going to bed.**
- **Have a lump at the top of incision. This will disappear with time.**
- **Have numbness and/or hypersensitivity of the skin on your chest. This will improve over the next several weeks.**
- **Experience muscle pain or tightness in your shoulders and upper back. Good posture will help this. Having your loved one rub your shoulders may help. You may carefully apply heat, but be very careful.**
- **Feel angry or depressed following heart surgery. This is normal! Sharing these feelings with a loved one can help. Maintain a positive outlook.**

Making Positive Lifestyle Changes

Exercising and taking care of yourself will help you regain strength and recover faster. Enrolling in a Cardiac Rehabilitation Program that includes exercise sessions, classes, nutrition counseling, and support groups may benefit many patients. Ask your doctor if this would benefit you.

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