

Going Home After Heart Surgery



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Developed by Allina Health.

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For specific information about your health condition, please contact your health care provider.





How Your Heart Works

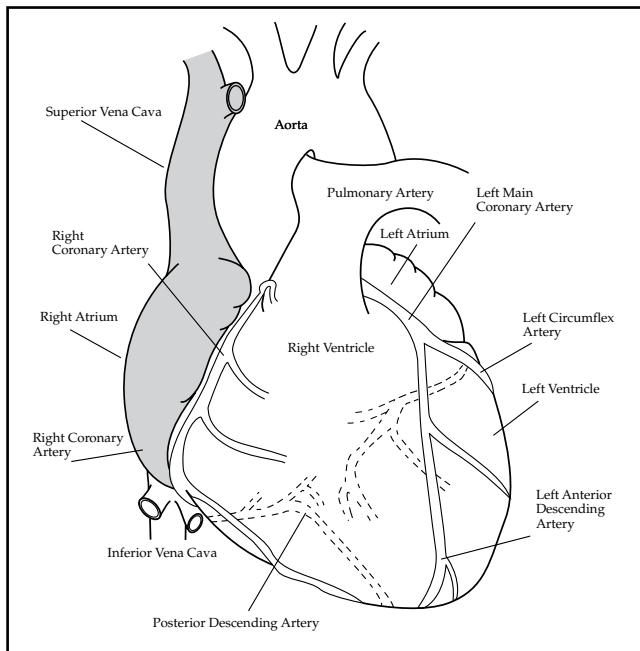
The heart is a muscle. The heart's main "job" is to pump blood rich in oxygen and nutrients through miles of blood vessels in your body. All cells in your body need oxygen to survive.

Each side of your heart has two chambers: an upper one (called an atrium) and a lower one (called a ventricle). Between each chamber are valves that keep your blood moving in the correct direction.

Two blood vessels and their branches, called coronary arteries, supply blood to your heart. These arteries are on the outside of your heart.

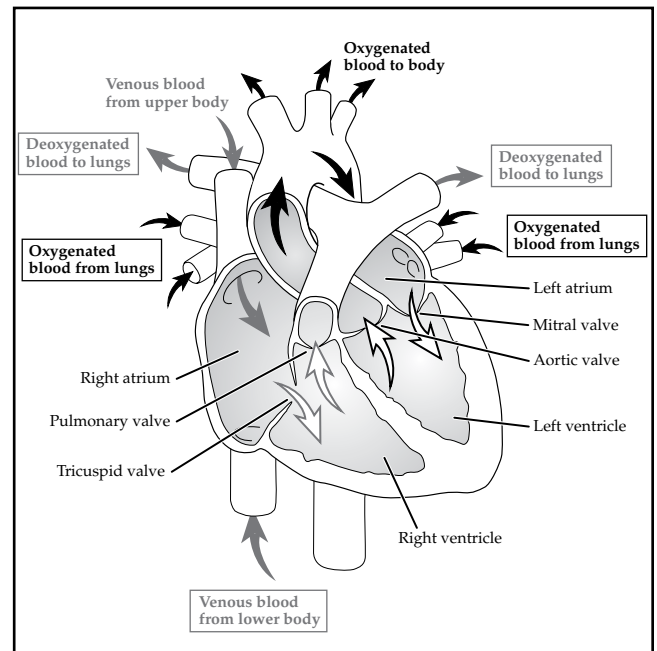
Your heart also has an electrical system, which powers your heart's pumping system. A group of special cells sends an electrical impulse through your heart muscle causing it to contract, or beat, about 60 to 100 times per minute.

These special cells are called the sinoatrial (SA) node and the atrioventricular (AV) node.



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Your heart muscle is about the size of an adult fist.



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The left side of your heart receives blood with new oxygen from your lungs and sends it to your body. The right side of your heart receives blood from your body and pumps it to your lungs.

Planning for Your Recovery

You are in the hospital to treat an illness caused by heart disease. The goal of your health care team is to help you regain your health. You are the most important person in determining how to manage your health.

Recovering from your surgery may take several weeks of steady progress before you feel like yourself again. You may feel a little weaker and tired when you arrive home. This is normal.

It is important to slowly increase your activity to regain your strength and independence. Be sure to get plenty of rest as you return to your normal activity level. The following guidelines are for your recovery. Talk with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

Use this booklet to write down important information, names, phone numbers, test scores, or questions you may have during your hospital stay.

Follow-up Appointment

After you leave the hospital you will need to see your family doctor in 7 to 10 days. Have someone help you call for this appointment before you leave the hospital or right away when you get home. **Be sure to tell your family doctor's office that you had heart surgery and must see your doctor in 7 to 10 days.**

Incision Care

- Take a shower every day with soap that doesn't contain perfume, lotion or moisturizer. Do not take a tub bath until your incisions are completely healed and there are no scabs. This usually takes 2 to 4 weeks.
- Keep a bandage over the chest tube sites until a scab forms or the drainage stops. Change the bandage every day and after showering.
- Do not put lotions, creams, powders or ointments on the incisions unless your doctor tells you to do so.
- You can expect drainage at your knee or ankle incisions. This drainage will be thin (like water) and should go away in a few days. You may cover the area with a bandage to protect your clothing.

- You may have swelling around the incision on your leg. This will last between 3 weeks and 3 months. Keep your leg elevated (raised) any time you are not walking or taking part in cardiac rehabilitation.
- You may have swelling at the top of your chest (sternum) incision. This should go away in 6 weeks to 3 months.
- Women who have a bra cup size C or larger are encouraged to wear a bra for 3 months to support the weight of the breasts on the healing incision. The bra may be removed while taking a shower, but wear it both day and night.
- Call your doctor if you have:
 - separation of your incision
 - a temperature of more than 101 F
 - chills or shaking
 - increased tenderness, warmth or redness around any incision
 - change in color or amount of drainage
 - drainage from your incision or chest tube site that is green, creamy, sticky or that lasts more than 2 weeks
 - any movement of your sternum
 - any questions or concerns.

Activity

- You are on a lifting restriction for 3 months:
 - Do not lift more than 10 pounds for 2 months.
 - Gradually increase your lifting restriction to 20 pounds during the third month of your recovery.
 - There is no lifting restriction after the 3 months if your sternum is well-healed and stable.
- Avoid any activities that require pushing or pulling with your upper arms. For activities that require your arms above your head (such as combing your hair), splint your incision with one hand while doing the activity with the other. Also, keep your elbows close to your body while your hands are raised. For the next 3 months, avoid:

<input type="checkbox"/> hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> golf
<input type="checkbox"/> fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> vacuuming
<input type="checkbox"/> bowling	<input type="checkbox"/> mowing the lawn
<input type="checkbox"/> swimming	<input type="checkbox"/> raking
<input type="checkbox"/> tennis	<input type="checkbox"/> changing the bed linens.

- Use your incentive spirometer 3 to 4 times each day for 2 weeks. Do 4 to 5 inhalations each time.
- Do not drive for 4 weeks after surgery, or as recommended by your doctor.
- Weigh yourself before breakfast every day. Call your doctor if you gain more than 3 pounds in 1 day or more than 5 pounds in 1 week.

Pain Medicine

- You may be given a prescription for pain medicine. As your discomfort becomes less, you can try taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®), or other over-the-counter medicines as advised by your doctor, for pain relief. If this does not give you relief, contact your doctor.

After Heart Valve Surgery

- If you have had a heart valve replacement you may be prescribed warfarin (Jantoven®). Please follow all instructions about this prescription medicine.
- If you have a heart valve disorder, or if you had valve surgery, you are at risk of getting bacterial endocarditis. This is an infection of your heart and valves. You will need to take an antibiotic before certain procedures to reduce your risk of infection. This includes:
 - all dental work and routine dental cleaning
 - any surgery
 - any procedure that involves entering any part of your body (such as a procedure that involves a scope).

You will be given guidelines from the American Heart Association for protection from endocarditis. Be sure to tell any dentist(s) and doctor(s) of your condition before having any procedure.

- **Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms of endocarditis:**
 - fever
 - chills
 - sweating
 - loss of appetite
 - fatigue (tiredness).

Activity and Exercise

Activity and exercise are important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. You can create an exercise program that fits your life and schedule. You will receive a home walking or biking program from your nurse or a cardiac rehabilitation staff member. This program has instructions about exercise and how to do it.

General guidelines about activity and exercise are:

- Do not walk outdoors in very hot or cold weather.
In extreme temperatures, do your walking in a shopping center or other community building.
- Try to walk on level surfaces in a safe area. Avoid hills.
- Wait 1 hour after eating a moderate meal before doing exercise.
- You should be able to have a conversation while you exercise.
If you are unable to do this, or if you have any problems, slow your pace until you feel comfortable.
- Wear comfortable athletic shoes and dress in layers so you can adjust to the temperature.

Signs you are doing too much

As you exercise, you should be aware of what's happening to your body. Signs you are doing too much include:

- dizziness or lightheadedness
- nausea and vomiting
- cold sweat
- shortness of breath, making conversation difficult
- exhaustion or unusual fatigue
- feeling as if your heart is suddenly racing or pounding
- any chest pain or pressure in your:
 - teeth
 - arm
 - jaw
 - ear
 - neck
 - between your shoulder blades.

Stop and rest if you feel any of these symptoms. If the symptoms do not go away with rest, or if they continue to limit your activity or exercise, call your doctor.

Returning to work

- At your next follow-up appointment, talk with your family doctor about when you can return to work.

Sexual activity

- You may resume sexual activity as soon as you are comfortable enough to tolerate activity equal to climbing two flights of stairs. There is no danger to your heart.
- Do not use positions that put weight on your arms.
- Call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:
 - rapid heart rate or shortness of breath that lasts 4 to 5 minutes after intercourse
 - chest pain during or after intercourse
 - feelings of extreme fatigue the next day.

Community programs

- Check with your insurance provider to see if you qualify for outpatient cardiac rehabilitation. This supervised program promotes positive lifestyle change through exercise, education and support.

Diet

- You will be given a prescribed diet to follow at home.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet to promote healing.
- Eat no more than 2,400 milligrams of salt each day.
- Control your weight. Carrying extra weight can make your heart work harder. Tell your doctor if you have a loss of appetite and are losing weight.

Tobacco and Alcohol Use

Tobacco use

- Do not use tobacco products.
 - Using tobacco increases your heart rate and blood pressure and narrows your blood vessels.
 - You are at an increased risk of heart attack, stroke and circulation problems.
 - Blood clots faster in people who smoke than in people who do not smoke.
 - The longer you remain smoke-free, the faster your body will heal.
- If you cannot quit, consider taking a break to let your body heal. (See a list of resources, see page 14.)

Alcohol use

- Check with your doctor about how much alcohol is safe for you. (In general, drink alcohol in moderation or not at all.)
- If you are taking a blood thinner, such as warfarin (Jantoven®), alcohol may change the effects of this medicine.
- If you have a drinking problem and need help, please talk with your doctor.

Emotional Health

After surgery you may feel anxious, fearful or have trouble concentrating. You may also feel tearful, emotional or depressed. These feelings are normal as you recover, and they usually go away during your recovery. You may have these feelings for up to 3 months after surgery.

If any of these feelings continue to bother you, or if you feel “blue,” sad, or lose interest in your favorite activities for more than 2 weeks at a time, call your doctor or nurse.

Common Concerns After Surgery

You may have any of the following symptoms. See the suggestions for how to help you cope.

Constipation

- Eat extra fruits, vegetables and cereals high in fiber.
- Check with your pharmacist about a mild, over-the-counter laxative that may work for you.

Loss of appetite

- Eat foods that give you a variety of choices every day.
- Eat small meals or healthy snacks often if you cannot eat full meals.

Insomnia

- Shorten your daytime naps during your recovery.
- Try relaxing activities before going to bed. Try reading, listening to music, or having a light snack.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a prescription for an over-the-counter sleep medicine. Sleep medicine is to be used for a short period of time only.

Fatigue

- Fatigue may last for 6 weeks to 3 months after surgery.
- Try not to do too much and rest often.

Incision discomfort

- You may feel discomfort at the incision sites for 6 weeks to 3 months. If the internal mammary artery was used as a bypass graft, you may feel sensitivity for up to 3 months. If the leg artery was used as a bypass graft, you may feel sensitivity for 6 weeks.
- Take Tylenol® or other over-the-counter medicines as advised or prescribed by your doctor.

Incision Versus Angina Pain

The following information explains the differences between incision pain and angina pain. There are also suggestions on how to relieve the pain.

If, after trying the suggestions, the pain continues or you are having problems telling what is causing the pain, please call your doctor.

Incision pain

What it is

- Incision pain is a constant pain that occurs when you move suddenly or change your position.

How to relieve it

- Try to relieve the pain by taking your prescription or over-the-counter pain medicine or by using the pain relief measures you learned in the hospital.

Angina pain

What it is

- Angina pain will likely be similar to what you felt before you had surgery. This may be:
 - a feeling of indigestion
 - a sharp, burning pain
 - an ache or numbness that begins in or spreads to your neck, jaw, throat, shoulder or back of your arms.

How to relieve it

If you feel symptoms of angina (as listed above), follow these steps unless your health care provider has given you other instructions:

- Take one nitroglycerin tablet or use one nitroglycerin spray. Sit for 5 minutes.
- If the angina goes away, rest for a while, then continue your normal routine.
- **If the angina does not go away or gets worse, call 911 right away. Do not delay. Do not drive yourself to a hospital Emergency Department or urgent care.**

Nitroglycerin Reminder

Carry your nitroglycerin with you at all times.

Keep the bottle in a cool, dark place. Nitroglycerin loses its strength when it is exposed to heat and light.

An unopened bottle should be good until the expiration date on the label.

Weight Record

Discharge Information

Date: _____

Doctor: _____

Blood Pressure: _____ Pulse: _____ Weight: _____

Call your doctor if you gain more than 3 pounds in one day or more than 5 pounds in 1 week.

Weight Record	
Date	Weight

Weight Record	
Date	Weight

Weight Record	
Date	Weight

Weight Record	
Date	Weight

Resources for Quitting Tobacco



Product-specific Resources

- financial aid Nicotrol® inhaler
 - 1-844-989-PATH (7284)
 - pfizerrxpathways.com
- Plant Extracts aromatherapy
 - 1-877-999-4236
 - plantextractsinc.com

Allina Health (if you had a recent hospital stay)

- Tobacco Intervention Program at Abbott Northwestern Hospital
 - 612-863-1648
- Tobacco Intervention Program at Mercy Hospital
 - 763-236-8008
- Tobacco Intervention Program at River Falls Area Hospital
 - 715-307-6075
- Tobacco Intervention Services at Allina Health United Hospital – Hastings Regina Campus
 - 715-307-6075
- *United Hospital Lung and Sleep Clinic Tobacco Cessation Program
 - 651-726-6200
- *Penny George™ Institute for Health and Healing (LiveWell Center) tobacco intervention coaching
 - 612-863-5178

Other

- Quit Partner
 - 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or quitpartnermn.com
 - My Life, My Quit™ (ages 13 to 17): text “Start My Quit” to 36072 or call 1-855-891-9989 to talk with a coach
 - American Indian: 1-833-9AI-QUIT or aiquit.com
 - Spanish: 1-855-DEJELO-YA (1-855-335-3569) or quitpartnermn.com/es
 - asiansmokersquitline.org
- online tobacco cessation support
 - smokefree.gov
- American Lung Association/Tobacco Quit Line
 - 651-227-8014 or 1-800-586-4872
- *Mayo Clinic Nicotine Dependence Center’s Residential Treatment Program
 - 1-800-344-5984 or 1-507-266-1930

***There may be a cost to you. Check with your insurance provider.**



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