

# Chapter 2: Hospital Stay and Recovery

## After Your Surgery

You will be moved to the Cardiovascular Surgical Intensive Care Unit (Station H-4200).

You can expect the following while you are in the Intensive Care Unit.

- The nurses will watch you closely.
- You will be unable to talk for the first few hours after surgery. A breathing machine (ventilator) will help your breathing during and right after surgery. Your nurse will help you communicate (either with your hands or blinking your eyes) during this time.
- You will receive medicines through intravenous (IV) lines in your arm or hand.
- You will be connected to a heart monitor to check your heart rate, heart rhythm, pulse and temperature.
- You will be in a positive pressure room and isolation to keep you from being exposed to germs.
- Everyone who enters your room will need to wash their hands. You may have visitors as long as they do not have an illness that could be spread (such as a cold or the flu).
- You will be asked to wear a mask when you leave your room. The mask will protect you from getting infections.
- When your doctors feel you are ready to leave the Intensive Care Unit, you will be moved to a telemetry unit. You will start rehabilitation to regain your strength, start taking your medicines on your own, and learn other self-care skills.

## Preparing To Go Home

While still in the hospital, you will learn how to begin your life as a transplant recipient. Routine care, medicine schedules and clinic visits will become familiar topics.

The more you learn, the better you can manage your health needs at home.

- **Learn about your medicines.** Be sure you know:
  - what they are (brand name and generic name)
  - when to take them
  - how to take them
  - why you need to take them
  - possible side effects.
- You will receive a medicine list to help you learn about your medicines.
- **Learn to check your pulse, temperature and weight once a day and your blood pressure twice a day.** Keep track of your numbers in the back of this book.
- **Wear a MedicAlert® bracelet.** This bracelet identifies you as a heart transplant recipient. Go to [medicalert.com](http://medicalert.com) for more information.
- **Learn the symptoms of infection and rejection.**  
See pages 18-20.

## Before You Go Home

Before you leave the hospital, you should be able to:

- identify your medicines, why you are taking them and how to take them
- use the medicine list when taking your medicines
- tell staff the signs of rejection and infection
- understand the follow-up plan
- write down important information in the Notes section starting on page 94.

# Activity Restrictions and General Guidelines After Surgery

## Temporary guidelines (up to 12 weeks after surgery)

The guidelines below will help you know which activities you can do after surgery and those you should avoid.

### From weeks 1 to 6:

- Do not drive for 6 weeks.
- Do not lift, push or pull anything weighing more than 10 pounds.
  - For example, do not vacuum, push the lawn mower or snowblower, open or close heavy doors, or change bed sheets.
- Do light to moderate activities at home, such as light housework and hobbies.
- Climb stairs only as needed. Try not to climb stairs often. Avoid carrying anything while climbing stairs for at least 2 weeks.

### From weeks 7 to 12:

- Do not lift more than 20 pounds.
- No rest — no zest. Allow time to rest between activities. Find a quiet time when you can relax. Put your feet up or nap.

## Cardiac Rehabilitation After Surgery

Starting a cardiovascular conditioning exercise program may be a challenge, but after a few days or weeks of regular exercise, you:

- will gain more strength and stamina
- will have better blood pressure control
- may feel more confident and independent
- may find it easier to maintain or lose weight
- may have more energy
- may help lower cholesterol and triglycerides
- may notice decreased stiffness, soreness and discomfort.

## Changes you may notice when you exercise

When you exercise, your muscles work to cause an increased amount of blood to return to your heart. Your new heart is then able to increase the amount of blood it pumps with each beat.

Chemicals released by your adrenal glands into your bloodstream will also cause your heart to beat faster during periods of exercise or stress.

Some other changes you may find after surgery:

- Your resting heart rate may be higher.
- You may get lightheaded when you change positions such as getting out of bed.
- Your heart rate will take longer to increase after you start exercising and longer to return to resting rate after stop exercising.
- You will not be able to receive sensations from your heart such as angina (chest pain). Studies are showing that in some cases nerve paths begin to re-grow, and people have reported feeling chest pain. **Call 911 if you feel chest pain.**

## Guidelines for the walking program

You started your walking program in the hospital. Continue your walking program the day you return home.

- Add 1 to 3 minutes each day.
- Your long-term goal is to work toward 30 to 45 minutes of aerobic exercise 5 times each week. Aerobic exercise is any exercise that increases your heart rate. This includes walking, swimming and biking.
- If you have any problems, slow your pace and remain at that level until it becomes easier.

## Warm up and cool down

Your heart rate will take longer to increase after starting exercise and longer to return to your resting rate. It is important to warm up and cool down.

- The warm up will allow your body to increase breathing, circulation and body temperature. This gets your body ready to exercise.
- The cool down will let your body adjust slowly to return to slowed breathing, circulation and body temperature. This gets your body ready for rest.

For both a warm up and cool down, walk 3 to 5 minutes at a leisurely pace. Gently stretch your muscles.

## Signs that you are doing too much

As you exercise, check your heart rate and your body's responses. Stop and rest if you have any of the following:

- feel dizzy or lightheaded
- have a cold sweat
- feel extremely tired or drained
- are short of breath (making talking difficult)
- have an upset stomach or vomiting
- feel as if your heart is suddenly racing or pounding
- have joint or muscle pain.

If your symptoms do not go away after resting, call your doctor.

**Important: Call 911 if you have chest pain or pressure that moves to the teeth, arm, jaw, ear, neck or back.**

## Whom to call with questions

Call the cardiac exercise therapist near your home or the Abbott Northwestern cardiac rehab therapist at 612-775-3381 or 1-800-553-4987 if you have questions about your home exercise program.

## Community programs

Outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation is a supervised program that may be located in or near your community. These programs promote positive lifestyle changes through physical exercise, education and support.

Programs meet 2 to 3 times a week, and may require a doctor's order to participate.

Check with your insurance provider to see if you have coverage or if you need a doctor's order.

## Lifetime Reminders

### Important

Call your transplant coordinator or health care team at **612-863-5638** for any questions, concerns or signs of infection or rejection.

The phone will be answered at all hours on all days.

### Signs of rejection

Watch for these signs of rejection:

- weight gain of:
  - more than 2 pounds overnight
  - or
  - more than 4 pounds in 1 week
- shortness of breath
- abdominal bloating
- loss of appetite
- ankle swelling
- fatigue or unusual tiredness
- feeling generally ill or flu-like
- low-grade fever (more than 100.5 F)
- lower blood pressure than normal
- irregular heartbeat
- slower or faster heart rate than normal.

**Call your transplant coordinator at 612-863-5638 right away if you have any of the above signs.**

## Important

Call your transplant coordinator or health care team at **612-863-5638** for any questions, concerns or signs of infection or rejection.

The phone will be answered at all hours on all days.

## Preventing rejection

- Take medicines as directed.
- Never stop, start or change doses of your medicines without talking with the transplant team.
- Do not take any over-the-counter medicines, herbs, health foods, or vitamins without first talking with your transplant team.
- Call your transplant team before taking any medicines prescribed by your regular doctor.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Call your transplant team if you miss a dose of any medicine, take an extra dose, or are unable to take your medicines.
- Keep your medicines at room temperature. Do not let them get cold or hot.
- Order medicine refills early to avoid running out.

## Signs of infection

Watch for these signs of infection:

- fever (more than 100.5 F)
- nasal congestion and drainage
- sinus pain or headache
- earache
- sore throat
- cough
- painful or burning urination
- urge to urinate often
- bloody or cloudy urine
- new vaginal or penile drainage
- skin wound that is tender, warm, red, has drainage or is swollen
- upset stomach or vomiting
- diarrhea (loose, watery stools)
- abdominal discomfort.

**Call your transplant coordinator at 612-863-5638 right away if you have any of the above signs.**

## Preventing infection

- Good handwashing is the No. 1 way to prevent infection.
- Take your temperature every evening. Call the transplant office or your regular doctor if your temperature is more than 100.5 F.
- Wash your incision with soap and water. Pat dry with a clean towel. You may take showers.
- Avoid being around large crowds and people who are sick for the first 3 months after surgery.
- Avoid changing diapers, touching stools or handling any body fluids from children for 6 weeks after they receive a live virus vaccination (shot).
- Wear your mask any time you are outside your home or room for 3 months.
- If you have well water, call your transplant team.
- Avoid cleaning up a pet's stool or urine. If you cannot, be sure to wear gloves.
- Wear gloves when you are working in soil.
- Call your transplant team:
  - before you have any medical procedures or surgeries (You may need to take antibiotics before the appointment.)
  - when you receive any vaccinations (shots)
  - before any dental visit, even a routine cleaning. (You will need to take antibiotics before the appointment.)
- Avoid swimming until the incision is completely healed.
- Do not use room humidifiers.

**Call your transplant coordinator at 612-863-5638 right away if you have any of the above signs.**



## **Clinic routines**

- ❑ For clinic visits:
  - Check in on the second floor of the Outpatient area of the Abbott Northwestern Heart Hospital.
  - Go to the lab on the first floor.
  - Come back to the second floor of the Heart Hospital for any scheduled tests and your clinic appointment.
- Bring your medicines and medicines reminder and daily record sheets with you to each visit.
- Take your cyclosporine or tacrolimus (Prograf®) after labs have been drawn.

## **Insurance**

- Call your transplant team if your insurance provider or coverage changes.
- If your insurance requires a referral or pre-authorization for outpatient services (such as clinic visits, biopsies or labs), call your regular clinic or insurance provider. The transplant office will not call your insurance provider for any outpatient services.

## **Diet**

- Follow the guidelines your dietitian gave you.
- Eat foods that are:
  - low in cholesterol
  - low in fat
  - have no salt added.
- Do not eat grapefruits or pomegranates. They change how well your medicine works.
- Do not eat raw or uncooked meat, fish or poultry.

## **Activity and exercise**

- For 6 weeks after surgery:
  - do not lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds
  - do not drive (talk with your transplant team before you start driving again)
- Walk every day.
- Follow the guidelines the rehab staff gave you.
- Enroll in a cardiac rehab program.
- Take many rest periods.