

Discharge Information for Patients after a Heart Operation

Warning Signs that must be reported to your doctor:

- *Breathing Difficulties*
- *Wound Problems: Signs of Inflammation/ Infection are swelling, redness, heat, pain or drainage from the incision site.*
- *Feeling Unwell → Temperature over 37.5°C or 99°.*
- *Following a Sternotomy: increasing pain or ,clicking noise' in the sternum (breast bone).*

Pain / Problems with the surgical wounds / stitches

You should feel pain-free after a few weeks. Difficulties such as feeling weather-changes, numbness or oversensitivity in the area of the surgical wounds can persist for a longer time.

You may need to take some pain medication before doing your breathing exercises to ensure doing the exercises effectively.

Medications

Right before you are discharged, you will receive a medication plan listing all current medications. Medications are only effective if taken exactly as prescribed. It is very important that your blood pressure and pulse are within the normal range.

You should know which medications you are taking. Please ask your healthcare professional if you are not sure of the effects or side-effects of your medication.

Caution: You need to consult with your doctor before you take any medications other than those prescribed (including vitamins, plant-based and homeopathic preparations or Viagra-type medications).

Following a Sternotomy: Protecting your breastbone (Sternum)

The breast bone should heal together within 8-12 weeks. During this ,healing period', you should refrain from the following: carrying anything heavier than 5kg (11lbs), strong twisting of your upper body, heavy physical work, or anything that pulls on one side of your body (i.e. walking the dog on a leash, raising or lowering heavy windows or shutters, swimming).

Continue to use a breastbone-protective position at home (i.e. care when getting out of bed, lying down in bed, coughing)

Wear the ,heart-hugger' brace for 4 to a maximum of 12 weeks after the operation (provided your doctor/surgeon recommends it)

Resting

Difficulty concentrating, tiring easily and depressive feelings during the first few weeks after the operation are common. Try to initially build more resting periods into your daily routine.

Respiratory therapy

Practicing deep breathing is recommended. Try to follow the instructions the respiratory or physical therapist gave you.

Care of the suture/incision line

Once the suture line is dry and free of any crusting or irritation, you can begin using a neutral, fatty ointment or cream (i.e. Excipial, Nivea creme, Almond oil) to gently massage the scar once a day.

To ensure that your scar heals and is barely visible. it is important to protect it from the sun. During the first 6-12 months following the surgery, protect the scar from the sun by covering it with clothing, or by regularly applying suncream factor 30 or above.

- Women after a Sternotomy: In order to aid the healing of the breastbone incision, women with a bra size of C or larger should wear their bra 24 hours/day until the wound is dry, and without crusting or irritation. Protect the scar from sweating or rubbing by putting a handkerchief, gaze or soft fabric between the scar and bra.

Personal Hygiene

You need to wait 14 days before showering following your pacemaker implantation.

For all other procedures on your heart, it is ok to get the suture line wet (showering at home or in rehab), however, try to avoid having a strong water-jet directly on the suture line.

You can take a bath 4 weeks after the surgery provided there are no wound-healing complications.

Pat the suture lines to wash or dry, avoid rubbing.

Returning to work

There is a strong relationship between the timepoint to resume work and the physical requirements of your job. Office work can be recommenced after 4-6 weeks, and a job with minimal physical activity can be resumed after 2 months. Jobs requiring greater physical efforts may be resumed after 3 months. It is best to discuss your situation directly with your doctor.

Driving a car

You can resume driving a car after 4-6 weeks provided your recovery has been free of complications.

You must discuss this first with your family doctor.

Your reaction time can be slower during the first 3-4 months after your operation. Try to avoid driving for long periods of time. This is your own responsibility. Also, be sure to wear your seatbelt.

Sexual Activity

Once you can walk stairs you can resume sexual activities (=light to middle level of physical activity)

- After a Sternotomy: Avoid placing strong pressure over your ribcage/chest during the first 8-12 weeks after the operation. If you are uncertain, speak about it with your doctor → see the information on „Protecting the Breast Bone“.

Healthy Behaviours:

Exercise and sports

It is recommended to engage in mild exercise 20-30 minutes/3 times a week (i.e. walking).

Heavier exercise, i.e. Nordic Walking, is allowed from 8 weeks after the operation.

You will find further information concerning physical therapy and sports in the information brochure from the physical therapist.

Diet and Nutrition

Try to eat a balanced diet. It is recommended to eat fresh vegetables and fruits, fish, grains and legumes. It is best to eat foods with unsaturated fats, i.e. olive oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, nuts and fish. If possible, limit your intake of saturated fats (hot dogs, sausages, and prepared meats, cream, butter) and other food that are high in cholesterol (eggs, fatty meats), and salty foods (bread and prepared foods that contain large amounts of hidden salt). Recommended salt intake is maximum 6 gm/day.

If you want or need to reduce your weight, consult your family doctor for help and advice.

Alcohol

Alcohol is allowed in limited quantities (i.e. maximum 1-2 glasses of wine or beer /day). Because alcohol may react with some of your medications, it is best to consult your family doctor for advice regarding alcohol intake.

Nicotine

Smoking is harmful for your health and may jeopardize the success of your operation.

If you smoke, think about whether you want to stop or not. Your family doctor can refer you to a smoking cessation program.

Stress

Avoid stressful situations. Stress causes your body to produce stress hormones that have a negative effect on the walls of your blood vessels.

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