

Heart Surgery: Pain Management

You have been through major surgery. It is normal to feel some level of pain and discomfort as you recover.

“Can you rate your pain for me on a scale of zero to ten?”

“Probably about an eight.”

“About an eight? Ok.”

When you are in pain, tell your cardiac care team. Managing your pain properly will allow you to feel comfortable enough to do the things you need to do in order to recover. There are many reasons after surgery that you may have pain. Because a breathing tube was used, some patients have a sore throat. You may notice soreness caused by increased activity as you start to get up and move around.

And you may have discomfort in the incision areas in your chest, legs or arms. The incision in your chest from heart surgery is called a Sternal Wound because it runs down the middle of your Chest bone or Sternum. It is common for your incision areas to feel tight, sore or numb and may look bruised or slightly red in color.

This incision pain will decrease as time goes by, but it will take about six to eight weeks for these areas to heal completely so be patient.

You may be given pain medications through your IV, with a Patient-Controlled Pump or as a pill or liquid. Take your pain medications as prescribed. They will help you to get active and get out of the hospital.

“It’s very important for you to share with your nurse that you’re having discomfort, don’t try to be tough and I can get through this. It’s important, we have medications that are ordered specifically for pain to help you to get through your daily uh activities of living.”

You are the one in pain, so you know your pain best. Your cardiac care team will ask you to describe and rate your pain. Be as specific as possible. Where is the pain, and what does it feel like? Rate your pain on a scale of zero to ten. Zero means no pain at all and ten means the worst pain you can imagine. Some pain scales have pictures as well as numbers to help you show your cardiac care team how you feel.

If you are already getting pain medications but you are still in pain, tell your cardiac care team. You may need to have your medications adjusted. If you still feel your pain is unmanageable after receiving your medication, talk to your cardiac care team about other options for pain control.

Changing positions often, elevating your legs, and practicing relaxation techniques can also help to relieve your pain. As you become more active and heal, your pain will gradually decrease and go away. Don’t let pain get in the way of your recovery progress. If you are in pain, take an active role in your pain management. Tell your cardiac care team and take your pain medications. They are there to help you recover and return you to your active lifestyle.