

# Heart Surgery: Increasing Your Activity in the Hospital

Increasing your activity level after heart surgery is an important part of your recovery. Being able to do some normal activities of daily living are the first steps you need to take in order to reach your overall recovery goals and leave the hospital. Begin by getting out of bed. Your cardiac care team will encourage you to get out of bed whenever possible. They will also teach you how to get up safely to protect your chest bone and incision.

Until you are physically able, get help to walk from your bed to the restroom. With assistance, you can move from your bed to a chair to eat your meals, visit with your family members and just relax. You may actually feel more comfortable sitting in a chair. For increased blood circulation, keep your feet elevated when sitting in a chair. If you need to, put a pillow under your legs to keep them raised. Do not cross your legs when you sit because it puts pressure on the veins under your legs. When you're getting out of the chair, hold a small pillow over your chest. Move to the front of the chair, keep your feet flat on the floor, lean forward, and push down with your legs to stand up.

Every time you move from your bed to the chair and back again, do so safely. Especially for those first few days you will be weaker than normal and need help. Don't be afraid to ask a nurse or other hospital staff member to help you. The nursing staff may also show your family members how to properly help you get out of bed.

Avoid putting pressure on your breastbone. Do not use your arms and upper body strength for assistance. Any pressure and strain on your incision site may cause complications. Instead, roll onto your side and use your legs and elbows to push yourself up. Gently put weight on your legs and stand up holding onto your bed handrail until you are steady on your feet.

As your recovery progresses and you are able to do more, you will start to walk around your room. At first you will need assistance from a nurse or therapist and possibly a device to help your balance. As you improve, you will need less assistance and eventually you'll be able to get around by yourself. Always wear slippers or socks that fit well and have non-skid soles.

Take short steps and rest when you need to. Pretty soon you will be able to go longer distances, like taking a walk down the hallway. Just remember, you have to come back, so don't overdo it. Rest if you need to.

When your cardiac care team tells you you're ready, you can start doing physical exercises to strengthen your legs and upper body. You may perform these exercises several times a day. As you recover, your cardiac care team will increase the amount of activity you do each day to further strengthen your heart and body. Be confident that your cardiac care team will only ask you to do an amount of activity that is safe for you. They will not put you in harm's way.

As you recover from heart surgery gradually increase your activity level in a safe and supervised way in order to reach your recovery goals. Be active, get out of bed to walk, do your exercises, and when the time is right, you will be discharged from the hospital to continue your recovery at home.