

Heart Surgery: At Discharge

“Hey guys. Are you ready to go home?”

“Absolutely.”

“Ok welll I have a few last- minute discharge instructions for you, ok?”

When it is time for you to leave the hospital, members of your cardiac care team will visit you. They'll go over specific guidelines to ensure a healthy recovery.

“We educate them regarding their medications, what they can expect when they leave the hospital and also prepare them as they start their rehabilitation into being, leading a more, healthy lifestyle.”

You will get a written discharge plan designed specifically for you. Your discharge plan will include information on pain and discomfort; incision care; diet and nutrition; and physical activity, including what you can and can't do over the next few weeks. It will detail all of the medications you are prescribed, including how much and when to take them. Pay special attention to this list; you may have been prescribed new medications while some of your old medications may have been changed or deleted. Don't take any medications that aren't on this list before talking with your healthcare provider.

If you have been prescribed an anticoagulant medication like Warfarin you will be tested to make sure your dosage is correct before you leave the hospital and you will be given specific instructions to follow. Also, your discharge plan will include when you can resume your normal activities like returning to work and driving. Note the date of your follow-up appointment on your discharge plan. It will probably be scheduled for a few weeks after you return home.

This is a lot of information. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

“So, do you guys have any questions?”

“Yeah actually, when can I pick up my son?”

And make sure you know who to call if you have any questions once you get home. It may help to have a family member or friend with you to help remember all of the information given.

Have a family member or friend drive you home. In the car, be careful around your incision area. Use a pillow or other soft object between your chest and the seat belt to cushion any direct pressure on your incision site. A lot of people feel more comfortable riding in the back seat.

“As I left the hospital on my way home, I had my heart pillow with me-- that was nice to have it with me a part of the hospital that came home with me.”

You've been through a lot and are ready to leave the hospital. At discharge, make sure you understand your instructions clearly in order to continue your recovery at home.