

Heart Surgery: Activity Guidelines for the First Few Weeks After Surgery

When you first arrive home, you may be anxious to return to your old pre-surgery routine right away. But as part of your recovering from heart surgery, you need to develop a new daily routine to help your body heal. Be patient. It may take some time to adjust to this new routine. Don't overdo it. Take some time to relax. Remember, your body is still healing.

Friends and family are an important source of support and will be anxious to see you but keep visits short during the first few days. You need your rest. And if someone has a cold or the flu, ask them to wait until they feel better to visit. As you recover, some activities may be restricted for the first couple of weeks, so your sternal wound can properly heal. The incision made during heart surgery is called a Sternal Wound because it runs down the middle of your Chest bone or Sternum.

Do not take a tub bath; Showers are ok, but you may need help during this time. Do not lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds or as directed, like groceries, laundry, or small children; Do not do any activity that causes pressure on your healing breastbone like heavy household chores, lawn work or gardening; Do not open windows, car doors and sliding glass doors; And you may need help walking upstairs. Some of these activities may be restricted for only a week or two. Others may be restricted until you return for your follow-up appointment.

"It's a lot more comfortable being at home. But obviously I couldn't do anything for the first three weeks. So, I just rested a lot, you know, took-- you know, I just watched my son play."

"I'm starting to feel useful again. I- I've- I have a- a purpose to my life, and every week, I feel stronger, I feel better."

As you get stronger, gradually increase the amount of activity you do. Take short walks, do minor household chores or repairs and light computer work. Ride in a car for short distances. And when you feel comfortable, resume sexual activity; typically, a few weeks after discharge.

Whatever you choose to do, make sure you balance any activity with rest. If you get tired, stop what you are doing and take a break. Napping is fine; just make sure you are still getting a good night's sleep.

You know "I'd like to go wash my car, I'd like to go play golf, I'd like to go you know do this or do that and that's one of the hardest parts."

If there are any activities you want to do, but aren't sure whether they are safe or not, talk to your healthcare provider. It is better to be confident you are doing activities that will help your recovery.

"I'm very grateful to have this second chance at life and that's how I got through my every day, one day at a time. I'm feeling better, I'm recovering; things are great."

The first weeks of your recovery at home can be challenging but follow your activity guidelines. Each and every day you will notice you can do more and feel better.