

# Heart Surgery: Incision Care

Whether you have had traditional Open-Heart Surgery, or your surgery was Minimally Invasive; you need to properly care for your incisions. Depending on the type of surgery you had, your incisions may be on your chest, side, leg or arm. You may have one long incision or several smaller ones. The pain from your incisions will decrease as you heal, but it will take about six to eight weeks for these areas to completely heal so be patient.

Be careful to follow your activity guidelines so you don't do anything to stretch or affect the incision sites. Don't lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds or as directed, like groceries, laundry, or small children. And don't lift your arms above your head with a lot of motion or using upper body strength.

Clean your incisions with warm water and soap. You can do this in the shower once your cardiac care team tells you that showering is ok. Remember; do not take a tub bath. If strips of tape were used to close your incision, your cardiac care team will let you know how and when you can wet and remove them. Don't apply any lotions or powders to the area until your incisions are completely healed, usually about four to six weeks after surgery. Check your incisions every day for signs of complications.

Normal signs of healing include: Minor redness, bruising, and numbness, soreness or itching. You may also notice a lump at the top of your chest incision. This is normal and will disappear in a few months. However, if you notice any signs of infection, contact your cardiac care team. Signs of infection include: Increased temperature, increased swelling around the incision area, tenderness, soreness, and drainage around the incision area. If you had Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery, you may have had a vein removed from your leg. This can be the most uncomfortable incision site.

*"Well, when I came home I noticed I had a sensation in my leg, so I had surgery right there. They took one vein out and it was very discomforting. It got numb some time."*

To relieve this pain and keep the swelling down, keep your legs elevated. You may find it helpful to place a pillow under your legs when you are sitting in a chair or lying in bed. At your follow-up appointments, your cardiac care team will check your incisions for any signs of infection and to make sure they are healing properly. But if you feel you are developing an infection or have questions about how your incisions are healing at any point, call your cardiac care team.