

Heart Surgery: Recovery Weeks 3-6

For most people, recovering from heart surgery will take about six weeks. From weeks 3 to 6 you should start to feel better and stronger, but it is important to remember that you are not fully healed. You are still recovering from major surgery. Your healthcare team may still recommend you avoid some activities.

You may not be able to drive yet. Don't take a tub bath; don't lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds or as directed, like groceries, laundry, or small children; Don't do any activity that causes pressure on your healing breastbone like heavy household chores, lawn work or gardening. But at this point in your recovery you may feel ready to increase your activity level. Walking is a good form of exercise and can be done almost anywhere. Do a little more each day for a slow and gradual recovery.

You may even add certain arm exercises approved by your Cardiac care team. But remember, no activities that put pressure on your chest or strain your incision sites. If you do get tired, rest. Do not overdo it. Talk to your healthcare provider about heart healthy lifestyle changes.

These include making healthy food choices, getting regular physical exercise, reducing stress and quitting smoking. If you still smoke, you must quit. Talk to your Cardiac care team about ways to quit smoking. If you did quit before your surgery, do not start again. You are finished smoking. Find ways to stay quit and distract yourself from craving tobacco.

During recovery weeks 3 to 6, continue to take your medications as directed. At this point your incisions may not hurt as much so your pain medications may change to over-the-counter medications. Continue to weigh yourself every day and write your weight in your log book. Taking your temperature every day is still important.

And continue to meet with your Cardiac care team. Take a complete list of all your medications with you to every appointment, as well as your weight and temperature logs. Before your appointment, write down any questions you may have. During your appointment your cardiac care team may lift some restrictions but not all of them.

As you continue to regain your strength and increase your activity levels, your cardiac care team will recommend you start a cardiac rehabilitation program. A Cardiac Rehabilitation program will set up an exercise program for you to follow in order to help your recovery and increase your overall heart health. As well as being monitored during activity, Cardiac Rehabilitation can provide you with a regular support group of people who have also had heart surgery.

And during Cardiac Rehab you can attend classes or receive counseling to help you make your heart healthy lifestyle changes. As you continue to recover from heart surgery, follow your cardiac care team's guidelines. And as each week passes you will get stronger and be able to do more and more.