
Discharge Instructions for Heart Attack

You have had a heart attack (acute myocardial infarction). A heart attack occurs when a vessel that sends blood to your heart suddenly becomes blocked. A lack of blood flow can damage or destroy part of the heart muscle. This causes your heart not to work as well as it should. Follow these guidelines for home care and lifestyle changes.

At home

- Check that you have a list of all the medicines you take. Take your medicines exactly as directed. Make sure you have a pharmacy so you can get the prescription filled. Don't skip doses. Talk with your health care provider if your medicines aren't working for you. Together you can come up with another treatment plan.
- Remember that recovery after a heart attack takes time. Plan to take it easy for at least 4 to 6 weeks while you recover. Then return to normal activity when your provider says it's OK.
- Ask your provider about joining a heart rehab program. This can help make your heart and lungs stronger and give you more energy and confidence.
- Tell your provider if you are feeling depressed. Feelings of sadness are common after a heart attack. But it's important to speak to someone or seek counseling if you are feeling overwhelmed by these feelings. These feelings most often pass within a month.
- **Call 911 right away if you have chest pain or pain that goes to your shoulder, neck, or back.** Don't drive yourself to the hospital.
- Ask your family members to learn CPR. This is an important skill that can save lives when it's needed.
- Learn to take your own blood pressure and pulse. Keep a record of your results. Ask your provider when you should seek emergency medical attention. They will tell you which blood pressure reading is dangerous.

Lifestyle changes

Your heart attack was likely caused by heart disease. Your health care provider will work with you to make changes to your lifestyle. This will help the heart disease from getting worse. These changes will most likely be a combination of diet and exercise.

Diet

Your health care provider will tell you what changes you need to make to your diet. You may need to see a registered dietitian for help with these diet changes. These changes may include:

- Cutting back on how much fat and cholesterol you eat.
- Cutting back on how much salt (sodium) you eat, especially if you have high blood pressure.
- Eating more fresh vegetables and fruits.

- Eating lean proteins, such as fish, poultry, beans, and peas, and eating less red meat and processed meats.
- Using low-fat dairy products.
- Using vegetable and nut oils in limited amounts.
- Limiting how many sweets and processed foods, such as chips, cookies, and baked goods, you eat.
- Limiting how often you eat out. And when you do eat out, making better food choices.
- Not eating fried or greasy foods, or foods high in saturated fat.

Exercise

Your health care provider may tell you to get more exercise if you haven't been physically active. Depending on your case, your provider may recommend an exercise program that is best for you. Warm up 5 to 10 minutes before exercising and cool down 5 to 10 minutes after exercising.

The cardiac rehab program

Ask your health care provider about a cardiac rehab program. Cardiac rehabilitation is a medically supervised program to help people who have heart disease. It's designed to improve heart recovery and your ability to function. It also helps prepare you for activities of daily living. People in this program may have recently had a heart attack or heart surgery. It may ease your symptoms and improve your sense of well-being. Your cardiac rehab program is designed to meet your needs. It's overseen by a cardiac doctor and a team of cardiac health providers. Your program may last from 6 weeks to up to a year.

The goal of cardiac rehab is to help ease your symptoms and make your heart as healthy as possible. Your program may include:

- **Exercise program.** This makes you more fit, and helps your heart work better.
- **Classes to help you change your lifestyle and habits.** For example, classes and support to help you quit smoking. Or you may take a nutrition class to learn how to eat better.
- **Stress management.** You will learn how to manage stress to lower your anxiety.
- **Counseling.** This will help you learn about your specific condition and how to live with it.
- **Occupational therapy.** This is to help you get ready to go back to work or to manage normal activities of daily living.

Other changes

Your health care provider may also recommend that you:

- **Lose weight.** If you are overweight or obese, your provider will work with you to lose extra pounds. Making diet changes and getting more exercise can help. A good goal is to lose your 10% of your body weight in one year.

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- **Stop smoking.** Sign up for a stop-smoking program to make it more likely for you to quit for good. You can join a stop-smoking support group. Or ask your provider about nicotine replacement products or medicines to help you quit.
 - **Learn to manage stress.** Stress management methods help you deal with stress in your home and work life. This will help you feel better emotionally and ease the strain on your heart.
 - **Control other conditions.** If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, or high cholesterol, your provider will work with you to control these diseases. All of these are risk factors for heart attacks.

Follow-up

Check that you have the details about all of your medical appointments once you leave the hospital. Or make a follow-up appointment as directed.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if you have:

- Chest pain or pain that goes to your neck, jaw, back, or shoulder.
- New shortness of breath.

When to call your doctor

Contact your health care provider right away if you have:

- Lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting.
- The feeling of an irregular heartbeat or fast pulse.