

Your Care at Home: After Cardiac Catheterization

Narrator

You've just had a cardiac catheterization, or cath, to see how your heart is working or to clear out a blockage. I'll bet you have a few questions about what happens next. Let's see if my friend and I can answer some of them for you.

Unless you were told otherwise, you can walk around within 6 hours after the procedure. And keep walking once you get home to build up your strength. You may feel tired and weak to start, so don't overdo it and rest between walks. Within a week, you should be back to normal. One more thing about walking, if your catheter was inserted into your groin, walk only on flat surfaces and limit trips up and down the stairs for the first few days.

How you care for yourself after a heart cath depends on where the catheter was inserted. Follow these steps, unless told otherwise.

If your incision is in your groin:

- Do NOT do yard work, squat, lift heavy objects, or play sports for at least 2 days.
- Take extra care not to strain during bowel movements for 3 to 4 days to prevent bleeding at the insertion site.

If your incision is in your arm:

- Do NOT lift anything heavy.
- If it weighs more than a gallon of milk, get someone to help, and don't do any heavy pushing or pulling.

Whether the catheter went in your groin or arm:

- You should be able to drive within 24 hours, and you could return to work in 2 to 3 days, as long as you don't do anything strenuous.
- Avoid sexual activity for 2 to 5 days, and do NOT take a bath or swim for the first week.
- Showers are fine, but be sure you keep the area where the catheter was inserted DRY for the first 24 to 48 hours.
- You might expect to feel some pain in your groin or arm where the catheter was placed.
- Bruising near the incision is also normal.
- If the incision bleeds, lie down and put pressure on it for 30 minutes.
- To change your bandage, or for any other questions, talk to your doctor.

What about medicines after your heart cath? Depending on the results, your doctor may want you on a blood thinner to prevent clotting. Blood clots can lead to a heart attack. Be sure to take the medicines exactly as prescribed, until you're told otherwise. Don't stop on your own. Before you go home, review ALL of your medicines with your healthcare team, to decide if you should continue with them. This is particularly true if you have diabetes. If your diabetes meds were adjusted after your procedure, ask when you should resume taking them.

A heart healthy diet and drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water every day, unless instructed otherwise, are the best way to recover after a heart cath and stay healthy. There are other changes you might need to make in your lifestyle, depending on what was found during your procedure. Once you've been given the okay to resume regular activities, here are some tips:

- Be active
- Take your medicines
- Watch your weight
- Don't smoke, and
- Follow up with your doctor regularly.

There are things you should watch out for after your cath. Before you leave the hospital, talk to your doctor about what to do if any of the following things occur:

- There is bleeding at the insertion site that just won't stop.
- The area near the incision changes color, feels cold or is numb. Or if it becomes red or painful, or yellow or green discharge is draining from it.
- Your pulse is either very slow (under 60 beats a minute) or very fast (over 100 beats per minute)
- You're dizzy, faint or extremely tired.
- You have chills or a fever over 101°
- You cough up blood or mucus, or
- You have problems taking any of your heart medicines.

Remember, if you have chest pain or shortness of breath that won't go away, call 911 immediately. Remember, your healthcare team is your best resource if you have ANY questions or concerns after your cardiac catheterization. Follow their advice and the tips we just showed you, and you'll be back on track in no time.

© The Wellness Network