



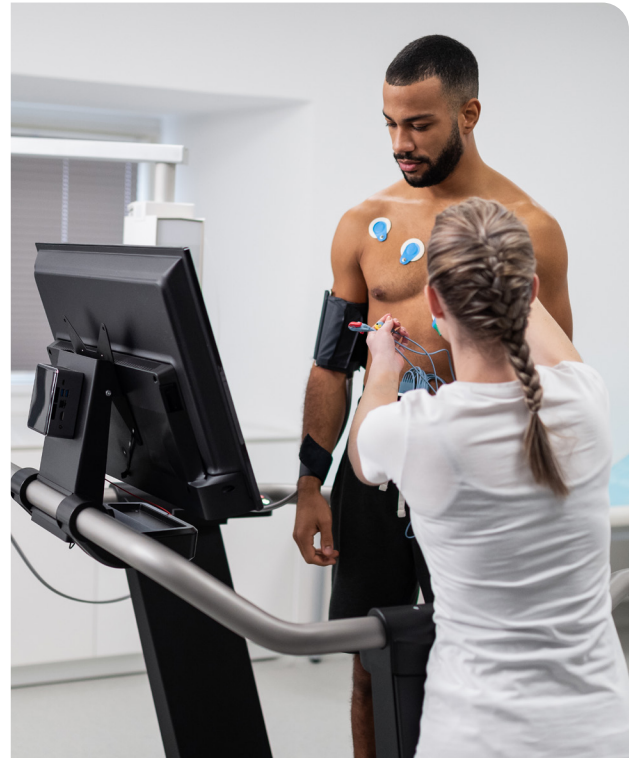
How Will I Recover From My Heart Attack?

Every year, many of the hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. who have a heart attack survive and enjoy a normal, productive life.

Your heart is healing. With each passing day, you can become stronger and more active.

Make preventing another heart attack your first priority. Here are five things you can do:

- Manage your risk factors.
- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Participate in cardiac rehabilitation.
- Attend your follow-up appointments with your health care team.
- Get support from others.



What changes should I make?

After a heart attack, it's important to manage your risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Be sure to:

- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Get help to quit if you smoke.
- Eat healthy meals low in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium (salt) and added sugars.
- Do regular physical activity.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.

Are my feelings normal?

After your heart attack, you'll probably feel a wide range of emotions. Fear, anxiety, anger and depression are some of the most common.

Fear:

- of dying
- of chest pains
- that you can't have sex
- that you can't work

Anger:

- that it happened to you
- at family and friends

Depression, such as thinking...

- "Life is over."
- You might not be the same again.
- Others might think you're weak.

Be patient. Give yourself a chance to recover. Over time, these feelings usually go away.

If you need help dealing with your emotions, ask your health care professional for resources to help you.

How will my family feel?

Your heart attack likely had an emotional impact on your family and friends as well. They were probably scared when you were in the hospital.

It's also common for family members to feel guilty. They may feel they did something that led to your heart attack. It's important to talk with them about their feelings.

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What about sex?

Most people can resume sex within a few weeks after a heart attack. Talk to your health care professional about the best time for you to return to sexual activity. In general, the following guidance can help you know if you're ready to resume sexual activity.

- If you don't have chest pain, shortness of breath or heart rhythm problems, you can usually resume sex after 1-2 weeks.
- If you had open-heart surgery, you can resume sex in about 6-8 weeks. It takes more time for the incision and breastbone to heal.
- Taking part in a cardiac rehabilitation program and getting regular exercise can help your body recover and be ready for resuming sexual activity.
- You may need an exercise stress test to see if sexual activity is safe for you.
- If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or other heart symptoms during sexual activity, you should stop and notify your health care professional.

When can I go back to work?

- Talk to your health care professional about a safe schedule for returning to work.



Check with your health care professional before resuming sexual activities.

- Most people go back to work within 2-3 months, but this can vary based on the type of work. People who work in physically demanding jobs may need longer before returning to work.
- Your health care professional may have you take tests to find out if you can do the kind of work you did before.
- In some cases, people with very physically demanding jobs may need to change jobs to make it easier on their heart.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Can I play sports?

What if I stay depressed?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.