



DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS AFTER HEART SURGERY

HOW DO I TAKE CARE OF MY INCISIONS?

Starting on the 6th day after surgery, you may shower. Shower daily using liquid bath soap without perfume or lotion (for example, Dial or Ivory). Do not use bar soap. To avoid dizziness, do not use very hot water.

- If you are washing your hair, do that first.
- At the end of your shower, clean your incisions (chest, leg, and/or arm)
- Gently pat each incision with a **CLEAN** soapy washcloth.
- Do Not Rub!!!
- Rinse the incision thoroughly using a gentle shower stream.
- After your shower, pat your incision dry with a **CLEAN** dry towel.
- Have someone nearby the first time you shower. If you feel weak, use a rubber-footed chair or stool to sit on in the shower.
- If you are unable to get into a shower, you may wash at the sink with running water and a clean, soapy washcloth. Rinse with a clean washcloth. Remember to use liquid soap.
- If you are sent home with staples or stitches we will make plans for you to return either to the surgeon or your local doctor to have them taken out.

To help prevent infections, **AVOID** touching your incisions as much as possible.

- Wear **clean** clothes next to your incision.
- Keep pets away from your incision.
- If you have drainage, it is OK to replace with a new gauze pad. Secure with tape. Change it every day.
- Care for your incisions only as instructed

Call your surgeon if you have any signs of infection: redness, pus, yellow drainage, odor, increased warmth, fever, or tenderness.

WHAT ABOUT ACTIVITY?

DO

- ♥ Gradually increase your activity each day. Walking several times during the morning and afternoon will help build your strength. This also helps prevent depression.
- ♥ Your surgeon will let you know when you may return to work.
- ♥ Cardiac Rehabilitation is encouraged around 6 weeks after having bypass or valve surgery. We will discuss this with you and provide information about programs available near your home. Your primary care physician or cardiologist should assist you with making the arrangements.
- ♥ You may resume sexual intercourse in 4-6 weeks.
- ♥ You may go up and down stairs 1 - 2 times a day the first week after discharge. Increase as tolerated after one week, but pace yourself.

DON'T

- ♥ DO NOT sit for long amounts of time (no more than 2 hours).
- ♥ DO NOT drive (this includes riding mowers, tractors, and golf carts) until you are cleared by your surgeon at your return appointment.
- ♥ DO NOT lift anything heavier than 10 pounds (a gallon jug of milk) until seen by your surgeon at your follow-up appointment.
- ♥ DO NOT operate heavy machinery or power tools for 6 weeks (e.g. drills, saws, etc.).

HOW DO I PROTECT MY BREASTBONE WHILE IT IS HEALING?

During open heart surgery the sternum (breast bone) is cut in half, and then wires are placed in the sternum to hold it together. Any movement that increases friction at the incision site may delay healing and increase the risk of infection. It takes 4-6 weeks for proper healing (up to 8 weeks if you are diabetic).

DO

- ♥ When getting out of bed, hug a pillow and roll onto your side using your legs for assistance. Gently push up with your shoulder and elbow to sit up as you kick your legs off the edge of the bed.
- ♥ When standing up, hug a pillow or place your hands on your knees, lean forward, and push up with your legs. Do not let someone pull on or under your arms – have them place their hands on your hips or backside to help with standing.
- ♥ Always use both arms to lift objects (no more than 10 lbs), and keep the object close to your body when moving it.
- ♥ Continue bathing, dressing, and grooming activities as usual.
- ♥ Female patients – wear a front-closing bra or hook the bra in the front and slide it behind you to avoid stretching both arms behind you.

DON'T

- ♥ DO NOT push or pull with your arms to change position in bed, to get up from sitting, or to get out of a car. This also includes not pulling on stair railings.
- ♥ DO NOT stretch both arms behind your back (i.e. putting on a coat)
- ♥ DO NOT lift more than 10 lbs. or allow infants or pets to lie on your chest.

WHAT KIND OF DIET DO I NEED TO FOLLOW?

- ♥ Replace saturated fats (margarine, butter, shortening) with unsaturated fats (olive oil, canola oil, avocado).
- ♥ Eat 5 servings of fruit and vegetables a day.
- ♥ Eat 6 servings of whole grain products a day.
- ♥ Eat 2 servings of fish a week.
- ♥ Low Sodium (2,300 mg/day). Do not add salt to your food.
- ♥ Avoid foods high in trans-fat (also called partially hydrogenated fat.)
- ♥ Avoid fried foods and high-fat baked goods.

OTHER THINGS I NEED TO DO OR KNOW

- ♥ Women need to wear a bra during the day and at night for the first 2 weeks, and then just during the day. You may place a piece of gauze between the incision and the bra if your skin feels irritated.
- ♥ Anti-Embolism stockings (TED hose) are special support stockings which we will give you to wear. Wear them for at least 2 weeks after you return home. Take them off twice a day for about 30 minutes.
- ♥ To protect your breastbone, you will need assistance taking the hose on and off. We will give you an extra pair to take home with you. Put on a clean pair each day. You may wash them in the sink. Hang them to dry.
- ♥ Weigh yourself every morning and keep a record. Wear similar clothing and urinate before weighing. Call your local doctor if you gain 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week.
- ♥ **DO NOT SMOKE OR USE TOBACCO PRODUCTS!!**
- ♥ Use your breathing machine (incentive spirometer) 6 times a day (8 to 10 breaths each time) for 2 weeks after you go home.
- ♥ Mood swings are common after heart surgery. Some people feel very good and then very bad or sad and cry easily. If this is a problem for you, talk to your family doctor.

- ♥ Prevent constipation by including plenty of fiber in your diet. Good sources include fresh fruits, vegetables, dried beans and whole grains. It is also important that you drink six to eight cups of non-caffeinated fluids per day to help prevent constipation.

WHAT ABOUT VISITS TO THE DOCTOR?

Make sure to keep your appointments with your doctors as listed on your discharge instructions.

WHEN CAN I GO HOME?

Your doctors will let you know the evening before discharge. Please arrange to have your family/ride here by 10:00 am. The average stay in the hospital for cardiac surgery patients is 4-7 days.



WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY SURGEON?



- ♥ Redness, tenderness, drainage, pus from the incision
- ♥ Fever >100 for more than 24 hours
- ♥ Increase of weight by 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week
- ♥ Increased shortness of breath
- ♥ Heartbeat that feels too fast, too slow, or skips
- ♥ Feeling weaker instead of stronger
- ♥ Aches, chills, and decreased appetite
- ♥ Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- ♥ Bruising, blood in urine or stool, bleeding gums

Monday – Friday 8:00 –5:00 call 434-243-6828

After hours call 434-924-0000 to page 1943.

For more information about your health, see www.medlineplus.gov
or call UVA Health Resource Office at 434-924-5000.