



# How Can I Recover From Heart Surgery?

## What should I expect immediately after heart surgery?

Immediately after your surgery, you'll be taken to an intensive care unit (ICU) or recovery room. A nurse will be with you at all times, and special equipment will be used to monitor your progress.

- Some people wake up an hour or two after surgery, but most take longer.
- You'll have a breathing tube in your mouth. It may be uncomfortable, and you won't be able to talk. It's usually removed within 24 hours.
- It's normal to have tubes and wires attached to your body. They help staff check your vital signs, take blood, give drugs and fluids, and drain body fluids.
- At first, bandages or dressings will cover your incision. The bandages will be removed a day or so later.
- You'll feel sore but probably not severe pain. If you have severe pain, you will be given medicine if you ask.

## When can my family visit?

Your family members may visit briefly within 45 minutes or an hour after your surgery. Their later visits must be arranged to fit the rules of the ICU.

## What should I expect from the rest of my hospital stay?

Several things will help you recover, including:

- **Getting out of bed.** Just moving in bed can help. Depending on the type of surgery you have, in a day or two — or sooner — you will sit in a chair and walk with help. Usually activity increases daily.
- **Breathing therapy.** This is done to remove fluids that collect in your lungs during and after heart surgery. Taking deep breaths and coughing may hurt, but won't harm your incision.



- **Water, fluids and food.** Most people drink the day after their surgery. You'll get regular foods as soon as you can tolerate them. Salt is often restricted.
- **Elastic stockings.** These will help blood circulate through the leg veins while you're not very active.
- **Bathing.** A bath or shower usually within three to four days after your surgery. The nurse should be close by during your first shower or bath.
- **Stitch removal.** If external stitches or staples were used to close your incision, they'll usually be removed in seven to 10 days.
- **Getting stronger.** Expect to feel better and stronger every day. It's normal to tire easily.

## What should I do after I go home?

Try to get back into a normal sleeping routine as soon as you can. Get up at a reasonable hour, shower and get dressed. Rest in mid-morning and again in the afternoon.

Take a short walk or ride a stationary bicycle every day, as advised by your doctor, and do a little more every day. Try to feel pleasantly tired at bedtime. It'll help you

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sleep. Taking pain medicine for a few days may make it easier to sleep. You'll probably tire easily for the first three weeks after the surgery. But about three to six weeks after surgery, you'll begin to feel better and have more strength.

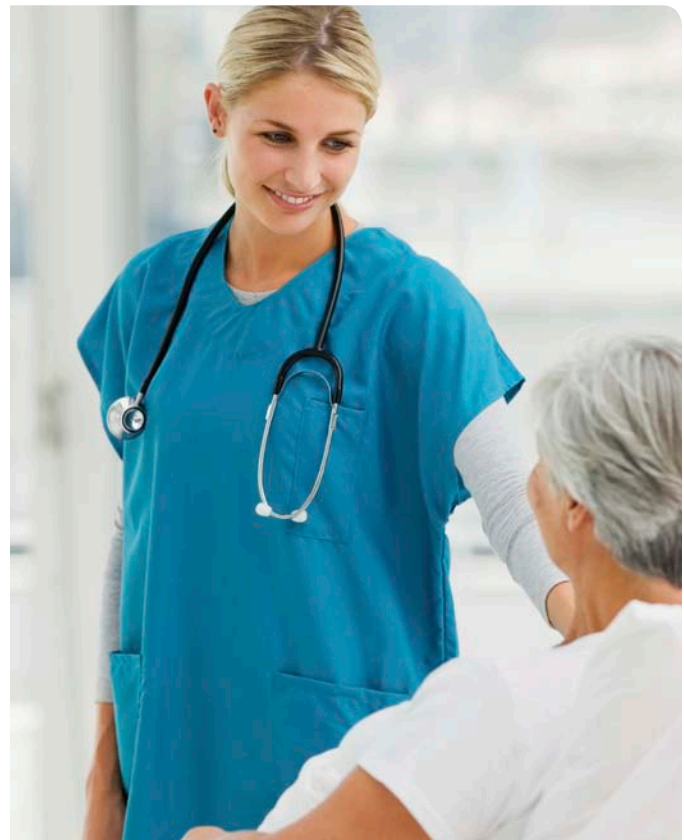
Take your temperature at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. daily for two or three weeks. Tell your doctor if your temperature is above 100° F (38° C).

Weigh yourself every day. Expect a little weight loss for about three weeks. If you gain more than five pounds, tell your doctor. You may be retaining fluid, which can be dangerous.

### Is there anything I should NOT do?

Your doctor will advise you when it is safe to drive and about lifting. Here is some general advice:

- Don't drive a car until you feel strong and well. Wait a few weeks. Don't try unless you're sure you can drive safely.
- Don't push, pull or lift anything weighing more than 10 pounds for at least six to eight weeks.



## 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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What kind of physical activity would be good for me?**

**How can I know what my weight should be?**

## My Questions:

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