

Advice following cardiac surgery

Cardiac Support Services

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

The information will help you and your family as you recover from cardiac surgery.

Your cardiac rehabilitation nurse will go through anything that you do not understand or would like more information about, please do not hesitate to ask any member of the team – we are here to help you.

Exercise

Keeping active is important. Start by going for a 5-minute walk every day and increase this as you feel able.

Aim for 'comfortable exertion' where you feel warmer, breathe a little deeper and faster but can still talk easily. If you feel dizzy or out of breath, slow down or stop for a rest. .

The aim should be to gradually increase the distance and pace that you are walking.

If you have mobility problems, stay as active as you can and aim to be able to do what you did before your surgery.

You may feel breathless at first, but this should improve over time. It is important to ensure that you can speak in full sentences whilst being physically active. If your breathing is worse than it was when you left hospital, please see your GP for a check-up.

Rest and sleep

It will take time for your health and fitness to improve. It is quite normal to feel tired for a while post-surgery. Ensure that you rest when you feel you need to.

It is recommended that you sleep off your side for the first 12 weeks. You may find it more comfortable sleeping on your back because of your healing chest wound and your chest bone. It is important to keep yourself well supported by using pillows or a back rest to help to keep you propped up in bed which will help you to breathe more easily.

Sexual activity

It is safe to resume sexual activity after your surgery whenever you and your partner feel ready. As a general rule, if you can comfortably climb two flights of stairs at a moderate pace without getting out of breath you are ready to resume your sex life. Like any activity after your operation, start slowly and avoid heavy lifting or pushing up for at least the first 6 weeks.

Caring for your wounds

Your wounds will take several weeks to heal and it is important that you check them daily. If they become very red, painful, swollen or oozy, or if you are worried about them, please go to your GP to have them checked.

If your wounds are dry they do not need any dressings. If they are oozy you may need to have them redressed by your local GP surgery. Do not rub anything into your wounds while they are healing. When they have become scars you can use a product such as vitamin E oil/bio oil that may help improve their appearance.

Your stitches are dissolvable but any small pieces outside your skin will not dissolve. If you see any such stitches outside your skin, these can be easily removed again at your GP surgery.

Washing and bathing

You can shower or wash but do not have a bath in the first six weeks. This is because you shouldn't push up with your arms to get out of the bath as this will put pressure on your healing sternum. You should also avoid soaking your wounds.

Medication

You should have been given enough tablets to last you two weeks after leaving hospital. See your GP for a repeat prescription as soon as possible as it is important that you don't allow them to run out.

Pain relief

You may have wound pain and/or discomfort in your neck, shoulders, back and legs. It is important to take the painkillers you have been prescribed. Continue to take the pain relief for as long as you need to. This is very important because if you do not control your pain it can slow down your recovery and make you feel low. Most people need to take regular pain relief for at least three to four weeks after discharge. When your pain starts easing, you can slowly reduce your dose.

The tablets may cause constipation. If this happens drink plenty of water and eat a high-fibre diet. If this does not help, your GP may need to prescribe you a laxative.

Follow-up appointments

You should receive a letter within a couple of weeks of being at home. Your initial appointment will be held at the hospital where you had your surgery. Please discuss with the surgeon or contact your cardiologist's secretary if you are unsure or do not receive an appointment.

Please arrange to see your GP in your first two weeks at home for a routine check-up to ensure you are recovering well and to get a repeat prescription. Your GP can also sign you off work.

Cardiac rehabilitation service

This is a service to support you once home and help you recover from your heart surgery. It will also involve a general health check and support to help you reduce your risks of further health events.

What activities should I avoid?

For six weeks after surgery:

- Do not drive. Tell your insurer you have had surgery; you do not need to inform the DVLA if you hold a normal car licence. Please phone us if you are unsure for further advice.
- You must avoid heavy lifting, pushing and pulling for at least six weeks, you can then gradually increase weight after this time. This means you should not be carrying heavy bags or saucepans, lifting children, vacuuming, digging or mowing the lawn because this will put strain on you breast bone.

Service contact details



The support service is available Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

If you need help for minor accidents or unexpected health problems, please call 111 (free from landlines and mobile phones).

They can offer help if you:

- Need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.
- Think you need to go to A&E or need another NHS urgent care service.
- Don't know who to call or you don't have a GP to call when you need health information or reassurance about what to do next.

Further information

For further information, please visit our website at www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

Useful links:

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

Telephone: 020 7935 0185

Website: www.bhf.org.uk

Heart Information Line: 08450 70 80 70

Heartswell South West

Heartswell Lodge, Blunts Lane, Plymouth, PL6 8BE

Telephone: 01752 315929

Website: www.heartstogether.org.uk

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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