

Cardiac surgery: Care at home

Wound Care

You may take a shower or sponge bath. Avoid very hot water. Do not soak (such as swimming or bathing) for 3-4 weeks after surgery. Do not put creams or ointments on your wound.

Allow Steri-Strips to fall off on their own. There are stitches at the top and bottom of your incision. The cardiologist will remove these prior to going home from the hospital or at the first clinic visit.

The chest tube sites may have a small amount of drainage for up to 2 weeks after surgery. Apply a new bandage every morning and evening until the drainage stops. Follow the cardiologist's instructions for care of these sites.

Activity

Check with the cardiologist about specific activity limits.

If your incision is over your breastbone, it will heal best if is not bumped or injured in any way. Check with your provider before taking part in sports and gym class.

Rest Periods

A balance of activity and rest periods is important when recovering from cardiac surgery. Climb stairs slowly. Walking is the best form of physical therapy, and should be done at your own pace. Stop and rest when needed.

Sexual Activity

Sexual relations can resume when you feel comfortable. For many people, this is 2-4 weeks after surgery, unless otherwise directed by your provider.

Driving

Avoid driving, biking, or motorcycle riding for 6 weeks after surgery. If you take a long trip, stop and walk around every 2 hours for a few minutes.

Lifting

Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling anything heavier than 10 pounds (i.e. a gallon of milk) for 6 weeks after surgery. This includes carrying children, mowing the lawn, or walking the dog.

When can I return to school/work?

Your provider will tell you when you can return to school or work. Talk with your teacher and the school nurse about any limitations because of the surgery.

What else do I need to know?

No dental procedures should be done for at least 6 weeks after surgery.

People with heart problems may be more likely to get endocarditis (heart infection) after routine dental care or some types of surgery. This can happen when bacteria that are normally found in the mouth enter the bloodstream and travel to the heart.

The risk of endocarditis is reduced with good dental care. Brush your teeth at least twice a day.

For some dental work, an antibiotic may be needed before and after the appointment. Check with your cardiologist if you have questions about the need for antibiotics.

When should I call the cardiologist?

- pain that is not relieved with prescribed medicines
- repeated vomiting
- not urinating at least every 8 hours
- breathing faster or harder
- poor appetite
- unusual cough
- pale or bluish color
- temperature higher than 101°F
- increasing swelling, redness, or warmth at the incision or the area around it
- drainage from the incision
- incision is not healing

What resources are available?

“Parents for Heart” is a support group for parents of children with heart problems. Call 612-813-6645, or visit www.parentsforheart.org.

The Children’s Heart Clinic has information about heart disease on their website: www.childrensheartclinic.org

Meld Special is a free Twin Cities program that offers information and support for parents of children with chronic conditions. The phone number is 612-332-7563.

PACER Center Inc. (612-827-2966) is a resource for parents of children with disabilities.

You may qualify for **financial help** because of your heart condition. Children’s social work staff can help you find out what financial resources are available. The nurse can help you contact them at your request.

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to you, but provides general information. If you have any questions, call the cardiologist.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the **Family Resource Center** library, or visit our Web site: www.childremsmn.org.

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