

After Heart Valve Surgery: At Home



You had surgery to repair or replace one or more of your heart valves. These valves make sure that blood flows through your heart the right way. You had heart valve surgery to improve the flow of blood through your heart. It should also decrease or stop the symptoms you have been having.

Home care

- Take your medicines exactly as directed. Don't skip doses.
- Don't use very hot water while showering. It can affect your blood flow and make you dizzy.
- Gently clean your incision every day with mild soap and water. Just let the water splash on it, apply the soap with your hand, and gently rinse. Don't rub it with a washcloth or anything similar. Gently pat dry the area of the incision. Don't use any powders, lotions, antibiotic creams, ointments, or oils on your incision until it's healed, unless advised to do so by your healthcare provider. Healing takes several weeks.
- Weigh yourself every day, at the same time of day, and in the same kind of clothes. A good time to weigh yourself is after you first urinate in the morning. Call your healthcare provider if you gain 2 pounds or more in 1 day, or 5 pounds in 1 week.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you feel depressed, have trouble sleeping, or have a low appetite that makes it hard to eat. These are common problems after surgery, but they can slow your recovery. It's important to get help.

Activity

- Discuss with your healthcare provider what you can and can't do as you recover. You will have good and bad days. This is normal.
- Let others drive for the first 6 weeks after your surgery, or as advised by your provider.
- Ask someone to stand nearby while you shower or do other activities, just in case you need help.
- Don't lift anything heavier than 5 pounds for 6 to 8 weeks. Your healthcare provider may give you a specific weight restriction.
- Until approved by your healthcare provider, don't mow the lawn, vacuum, or do other activities that could strain your breastbone. Don't do activities that involve lifting your arms higher than shoulder level.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can expect to return to work.

Lifestyle changes

- Keep a healthy weight. Get help to lose any extra pounds.
- Cut back on salt. Limit canned, dried, packaged, and fast foods. Don't add salt to your food at the table. Season foods with herbs instead of salt when you cook.
- Don't smoke. Join a stop-smoking program to help you stop.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can start a walking program.

To start a walking program:

- If you haven't already started a walking program in the hospital, begin with short walks (about 5 minutes) at home. Go a little longer each day.
- Choose a safe place with a level surface, such as a local park or mall.
- Wear supportive shoes to prevent injury to knees and ankles.
- Walk with someone. It's more fun and helps you stay with it.

Follow-up care

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your provider or their staff. You will have an ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) more than once over time to make sure the new heart valve is working well.

You may need to take medicines to thin your blood after having your heart valve replaced. You may also need blood tests to check how these medicines are working. Make sure you understand the instructions for these.

You may need to take antibiotics before having any dental work or medical procedures. This is common for people who had heart valve surgery. Ask your healthcare provider for instructions before dental cleanings or medical procedures.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Redness, swelling, bad odor, fluid, or warmth at the incision site
- Weight gain of more than 2 pounds in 24 hours or more than 5 pounds in 1 week (s)
- New or worse swelling in your hands, feet, or ankles
- Pain that doesn't get better or gets worse
- A change in the location or type of pain
- A small amount of bleeding from your wound that stops promptly by itself or with pressure and a bandage

When to call 911

Call 911 if any of the following occur:

- New or unusual chest pain or a return of the heart symptoms you had before surgery
- New or unusual shortness of breath
- Feeling faint or lightheaded, passing out
- A heartbeat (pulse) that is fast, slow , or irregular (extra beats or skipped beats)
- Heavy or persistent bleeding

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