







## Mood variations and depression

It is common to experience changes in your mood and emotions. You may feel up and down, low in mood, bored, frustrated, anxious, tearful, grumpy, angry or depressed. Not being able to do as much as you want to can contribute to this but be patient, you will improve.

If your mood remains low and you do not feel like getting out of bed, showering or going for your walks, you should discuss this with your GP. **Depression** can occur and is a recognized medical condition that may occur following a stressful event such as heart surgery and it can affect your recovery.

**Irritability** is more likely to be noted by your partner and family than by you. If you are very irritable, it often leads to feeling guilty and unhappy, even tearful. This is reasonable given what you have been through.

You may also be **forgetful**, find your mind wanders when having a conversation, and **lack concentration**, making it difficult to watch TV and read books or newspapers. This can be made worse by lack of sleep, worry, anxiety and memory of the trauma and uncertainty while having your surgery. It takes time to recover and regain your confidence. Your mood and general well-being will tend to fluctuate from day to day for one to two months after surgery.

For some patients these changes can occur weeks or even months after the surgery. It is important to know that this can happen for no apparent reason and does not mean that things are going wrong. Instead it is a normal but **delayed reaction** to your surgery.

Following any large operation or illness it is normal to feel **stressed** by things that previously may not have worried you e.g. noise, visitors etc. This is because your body and mind have been through so much and are not yet fully recovered. As you recover your strength, confidence and vitality you will be able to cope again.

Such feelings can be managed by maintaining your usual daily activities, planning some different activities each day, going on outings and talking about your feelings with your close family or friends.

Once at home get back into normal routines as soon as possible, building your activities from where you left off in hospital. Get up at your usual hour, shower and dress in day clothes.

Well meaning relatives and friends may offer advice and suggestions. Try to avoid conflicts over this advice and do what you feel is best for you and your family.

Remember that optimism and positive thinking give you a big boost.



## Returning to activity

Exercise and rest should be well balanced for a successful recovery from heart surgery. It takes time to regain stamina, endurance and energy levels after surgery. It can be helpful to sit and rest for 10 to 20 minutes between activities for the first few weeks after surgery.

1st week home	2nd to 6th weeks
<p>Start your walking programme</p> <p>Have frequent rests - avoid a lot of visitors</p> <p>Shower and dress each day</p> <p>Wash hair</p> <p>Sedentary hobbies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading</li> <li>• cards</li> <li>• television</li> <li>• computer</li> </ul>	<p>Progress walking programme</p> <p>Work at a bench or table height</p> <p>Avoid standing for long periods</p> <p>Simple meal preparation</p> <p>Dusting</p> <p>Handwashing and hang light clothing items</p> <p>Ironing for short periods</p> <p>Pull up bedclothes</p> <p>Handheld hosing of garden</p> <p>Golf putting practice only</p> <p>Driving from 4 weeks</p>
6th to 12th weeks	After 12 weeks
<p>Progress walking programme</p> <p>Gradually include reaching and bending jobs</p> <p>Bed-making</p> <p>Car washing</p> <p>Window cleaning</p> <p>Leaf raking</p> <p>Prune small shrubs</p> <p>Weeding (sitting rather than standing)</p> <p>Driving short distances</p> <p>Walk a dog on a leash</p>	<p>Vaccuming</p> <p>Gradually resume light digging and hoeing</p> <p>Lawn mowing</p> <p>Darts</p> <p>Lawn bowls</p> <p>Table tennis</p> <p>Fishing</p> <p>Jogging</p> <p>Swimming</p> 

## Monitor your walking

### Ask yourself:

- Can I walk and talk at the same time?
- Do I feel that I have recovered 30 minutes after exercise?

### For safe walking, remember to:

- start and finish each walk slowly
- wear comfortable clothing suitable for the weather and shoes which provide good foot support
- use the scale as a guide to how hard you are working
- avoid extreme temperatures
- take a cell phone with you
- for the first 10 days take a companion with you
- take your GTN spray if you have been advised by your doctor

### Stop the activity and rest if you feel:

- chest pain
- faint
- excessive sweating or puffing
- clammy skin
- rapid or weak pulse
- abdominal pain
- nausea.

### If symptoms persist consult your doctor

To follow your progress, record the amount of exercise you are participating in on the exercise log.

## Suggestions for managing stress

- Set aside some time during the day to practice relaxation and schedule it into your daily activities
- Allow extra time if you feel particularly tense
- Try to cut down overcrowded schedules
- Plan and space activities
- Review your use of time away from your job
- Make time for fun and relaxation
- Resist doing everything yourself
- Resist planning to do more than you can handle
- Divide your workload
- Take one thing at a time
- Look at the expectations you have of yourself. Are these reasonable for your time and your abilities?
- Learn to say "NO"

Time for yourself is very important. Do not push yourself to be involved in extra social and civic activities. If you think stress is an issue for you, and you would like advice and to discuss it further, please contact the Cardiac Social Worker on phone (03) 364-0420 or speak to your general practitioner.

## Sleeping patterns



It is very common for people to sleep poorly while in hospital and for this to continue once they go home. This includes having trouble getting to sleep, sleeping for short periods, waking during the night, and having bad dreams and nightmares. This should improve over the next month or two but can persist for many months.

If sleeping is disturbed by pain or discomfort you need to ensure you are taking regular paracetamol/panadol and if this is not enough then talk to your doctor about getting stronger pain relief.

It may also be useful to try sleeping in different positions. It is okay to lie on your back, or either side, but avoid lying on your stomach for eight weeks.

Using a pillow to support your sternum may help and sleeping more upright on as many pillows as it takes to be comfortable can also help.

Relaxation techniques and relaxing music may also help some people.

It is also important to have a regular rests and a short sleep during the day as daily activities will be tiring and you will become fatigued if you do too much.

## Tiredness and fatigue

Right now your body treats all activity as work. Routines that you once took for granted like brushing your hair, shaving and showering can all be very tiring when recovering from heart surgery. Most people will have a lowered haemoglobin level in the blood (anaemia) which can contribute to feelings of tiredness and fatigue. You can improve iron levels in your blood by eating iron rich foods. Adequate rest periods are essential to your recovery but avoid long periods of inactivity as this will result in increased body discomfort and a reduction in blood circulation to body tissues.

Plan one day at a time, listen to your body and progress at your own rate. Don't push yourself or compare yourself to others; it takes time to regain your strength. Gradually resume your daily activities by doing small amounts of various activities at first rather than trying to achieve all at once. Your confidence will increase as your energy increases and you are able to do more.

## Altered vision

Visual changes such as blurred or double vision are also common. The cause of this is mixed and uncertain. However, after a few weeks or months your vision usually returns to normal. Do not get your glasses adjusted in the early months of your recovery.

## Appetite

It is common to experience a loss of appetite and sometimes nausea/feeling sick in the first few weeks after your surgery. Many people notice that their sense of taste is diminished or almost absent and some report a metallic taste in their mouth. To begin with, small frequent snacks may be easier to manage than large meals. Try to drink plenty of fluids. Ginger ale or ginger beer can relieve nausea in some people. It is important to eat even if you are not feeling hungry. Foods high in protein will aid healing. Your appetite will improve as you begin to recover. If you are feeling nauseated most of the time, talk to your General Practitioner about this.

## Elimination

Constipation is very common following a big operation and can be due to inactivity, poor fluid intake, lack of appetite and dietary changes while in hospital. Some of the medications you are taking can contribute to constipation.

Some suggestions to reduce constipation are:

- Regular exercise
- Include in your diet, Bran, Grains, Plenty of water, Fruit and vegetables (kiwifruit and prunes are good!)

Kiwicrush is readily available from the supermarket, laxatives can be bought at your pharmacy or talk to your General Practitioner.

A small number of people may also have urinary problems. If you experience any urinary frequency or burning on passing urine you may have a urinary infection and need to talk to your doctor about this.

Also if you are having trouble passing urine, can only pass small amounts at a time and feel your lower abdomen is becoming distended and uncomfortable you may have urinary retention and will need to see a doctor.

## Visitors

Short visits are advisable for the first one to two weeks at home. Visitors mean well, but can be tiring and so can a lot of phone calls. Let friends and family know that rest is an important part of your recovery. Do not be afraid to excuse yourself from visitors when you feel tired and in need of rest. People may not realize how tired you are until you tell them.

## Spouse/caregiver

Often the person who has had heart surgery does very well in the early stages, but the partner or the person caring for them gets very tired and run down.

When you are looking after someone who has had heart surgery, try to take a rest yourself while the person you are caring for is resting, and to get a good night's sleep. Don't try to do too much for the person. This is tiring and stressful for both of you, and in the end will not help either of you. Make sure you have time to yourself.

Remember to communicate with other people during these weeks, especially with your partner, your family and your friends. Don't get too concerned with burdening your partner with your fears and feelings. You will probably find that you are both thinking the same thing. Talking to each other about your thoughts and feelings will help your recovery by relieving stress at what can be a difficult time.

## Protection against infection – Valve Surgery

It is very important to protect yourself against infection, especially if you have undergone valve repair or replacement surgery.

People who have had heart valve surgery are at risk of an infection called "Bacterial Endocarditis". This occurs when bacteria pass through the blood stream, settle on the valve and damage it.

Make sure you tell your dentist and other doctors caring for you that you have had valve surgery. Antibiotics should be given to you before and after any dental work, including routine cleaning. During dental work as in other surgical procedures, bacteria can be released into the bloodstream and lodge on the heart's prosthetic valve, causing an infection. You should have a dental check up every nine months.

Antibiotics should also be given before and after any surgical procedures to prevent possible infection.

You should see your General practitioner if you have any of the following

- Infected cuts
- Boils
- Sore throats and heavy colds
- Infections in the mouth
- Burning upon passing urine
- Fever or sweats especially at night
- General feeling of being unwell or flu like symptoms that persist
- Swelling in feet, legs or hands
- Diarrhoea

By doing so, you can help protect your valve against infection.

It is recommended that you apply for a Medic Alert Bracelet if you have had valve replacement surgery.

## Walking Programme

Exercise is a very important part of your recovery as it helps prevent surgical complications and helps with general recovery. The best form of exercise following heart surgery is walking.

To get the benefits of walking aim to do it regularly, on most days. Exercise at a moderate intensity, unless advised not to by your doctor. Moderate intensity is exercise that is neither too hard, nor too easy. Mild shortness of breath, sweating and increased heart rate is normal.

Your aim is to exercise hard enough to benefit your heart, but not strain it. You should not feel uncomfortable or exhausted when you are exercising. You are exercising too hard if you feel excessively short of breath, faint or dizzy.

As your fitness improves, you can make your exercise harder by increasing the time or distance of your walk. Take hills and stairs gradually at first.

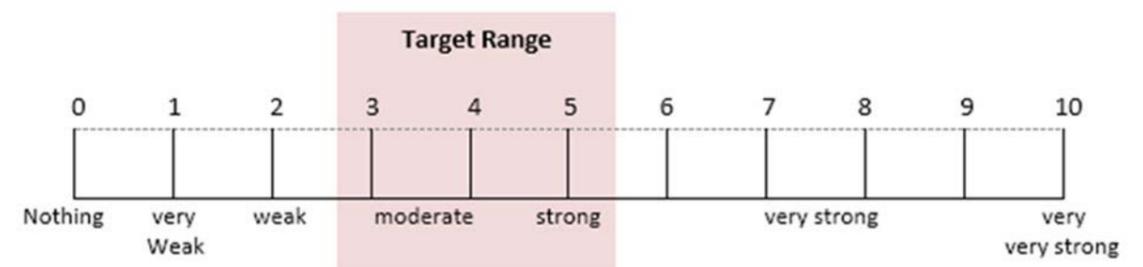
Make a note of how you feel after walking. If you find any time or distance tires you out, or causes discomfort do not increase the time or distance until you can do it without discomfort. Review your program with the physiotherapist any time during your rehabilitation.

## Walking programme example

Week	Minimum Time (minutes)	Times per Day	Pace
1	5-10	2	Stroll
2	10-15	2	Comfortable
3	15-20	2	Steady
4	20-25	1-2	Stride out
5	25-30	1-2	Brisk
6	30-40+	1	Stride out/brisk

This programme is a guideline only and you may feel you are able to do more than the recommended amount, or not as much as the recommended amount. Before you are discharged the physiotherapist will discuss an individual programme with you.

Use this scale to indicate how hard you feel the exercise is. Aim to exercise at around the moderate to strong (3-6) level on the scale.



## Exercises following heart surgery

The goal is to restore full range of movement to the body and to improve posture.

Should any of these exercises cause pain, do not continue and consult your physiotherapist.

**At Home:** Do these exercises twice daily. Repeat each 5-10 times. Continue to do these exercises for eight weeks.

<p><b>Exercise 1</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sit or stand with good posture.</li> <li>2. Keeping your face forward, tip your ear towards your right shoulder.</li> <li>3. Repeat on the left side.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Exercise 2</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sit or stand with good posture.</li> <li>2. Turn your head to the right side.</li> <li>3. Repeat to the left side.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Exercise 3</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sit or stand with good posture.</li> <li>2. Raise both arms and lower both arms.</li> <li>3. Repeat.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Exercise 4</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sit or stand with good posture.</li> <li>2. Pull the right elbow and arm across your chest gently.</li> <li>3. Repeat with left elbow and arm.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Exercise 5</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sit or stand with good posture.</li> <li>2. Begin with shoulders relaxed.</li> <li>3. Hunch shoulders up towards your ears.</li> <li>4. Relax your shoulders and repeat.</li> </ol>	

## Warfarin

This is an anticoagulant that thins the blood and is given if you have a mechanical valve, to protect against the formation of clots on that new valve.

You should have received written information and the little red Warfarin book, watched a DVD, and talked to the Pharmacist about Warfarin.

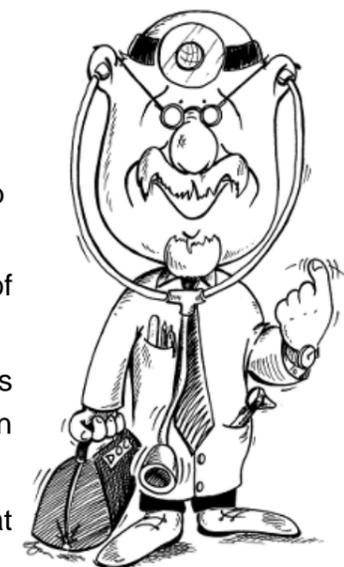
You need to remember what your INR blood result should be (it varies depending on your valve surgery), and if your blood result is not within that range, talk to your doctor about the need to change your warfarin dose.

If you still feel unsure about managing and understanding warfarin use, a Pharmacist can visit you at home and assist with this as well as help with understanding all of your medication. Ask your doctor for a referral (see pamphlet for Medication Management service in your rehab folder).

## When to call your doctor

If you experience any of the following, you should report them to your general practitioner.

- Any high temperature
- New signs of swelling, redness or discharge at your incisions (scar lines)
- Angina symptoms like those you had before your surgery
- Pain in your chest, neck or shoulders that is worse when taking a deep breath
- Any flu like symptoms/feelings such as aches, chills, fever, loss of appetite or fatigue that persist
- Persistent rapid, irregular pulse rate or palpitations – if this is associated with shortness of breath or dizziness, call an ambulance on 111
- Shortness of breath that goes on after an activity has stopped or that occurs at rest or that is getting worse day by day
- Weight gain of 1.5 to 2 kgs in 2-3 days, especially if associated with shortness of breath, ankle or abdominal swelling.
- Severe bruising (for no known reason) or bleeding.



## Driving

You should not resume driving your car until 4-6 weeks after your surgery. Remember that during your recovery your reaction time and concentration will be slowed due to weakness, fatigue or medication. Your neck and shoulders may be stiff for a few weeks after surgery and this may restrict your ability to drive safely. If you don't feel well, don't drive. You must wear a seatbelt to protect your sternum. If this is uncomfortable try placing a small pillow or piece of foam between your chest and the seat belt. It is advisable to contact your insurance company before you start driving to check their policy on driving after heart surgery.

## Decision making

Wait until you have completely recovered before you make decisions about your long term future. Sometimes people may make big decisions about their lives, such as not resuming work or abandoning other social or pleasurable activities which is not always necessary. Once you feel well, it is usually possible to resume all your previous activities including social activities.

## Resuming sexual activity

Sexual activity can be resumed when you feel comfortable and well rested, which is generally 3-4 weeks after discharge from hospital. The amount of energy needed for sexual activity is about the same as walking up two flights of stairs briskly, so it will not unduly affect your heart. You will need to find a position that is comfortable and doesn't place any stress on your chest or restrict your breathing. Avoid positions where your arms are supporting your body weight.

If you normally take Cilais, Viagra or any other medication to help with sex, please check with your doctor that these medications are still safe to take.

Having a low sex drive after surgery is not uncommon, but it may be something to discuss with your partner or doctor.

## Cardiac Rehabilitation

Approximately six weeks after your discharge, you will be invited to attend the cardiac rehabilitation clinic. Cardiac rehabilitation programmes can help improve your heart health and reduce your chances of having a future heart event. It is an important part of your treatment, and will provide you and your partner or a family/whanau member with information and support needed for a faster recovery, helping you to return to a full and healthier life. Programmes are delivered in different ways (including home-based) and usually have three phases:

**Phase 1:** While you are in hospital you will be invited to attend a cardiac rehabilitation programme. You will be given advice on lifestyle changes and the medications you are on.

**Phase 2:** Following discharge, health professionals are available to give you advice and support on exercise, healthy eating, smoking cessation, stress management, medication and work.

**Phase 3:** Your local cardiac club can offer you on-going support to maintain healthy lifestyle changes. Cardiac clubs can offer education, exercise and emotional support for you and your family/whanau. You should also visit your GP regularly for check-ups.

## Sternal precautions

**During the first 6-12 weeks** it is important to prevent excess strain and pressure on the sternum (breastbone). If you do an activity that causes you to feel a strong pull along your sternum, stop the activity.

- Avoid arm exercise machines such as rowers and stationary cycles with arm levers unless cleared by your doctor.
- Discontinue activities that cause pain, pulling or shifting across your chest.

**ABSOLUTELY NO GOLFING, BOWLING OR RACQUET SPORTS FOR THREE MONTHS.**

## Please follow these precautions:

Avoid lifting, pushing or pulling more than 5 kilograms for 6 weeks (10 pounds). When possible, use both arms to pick up or carry objects instead of carrying things one-handed which puts added stress on the sternum.

Avoid placing pressure on your arms for support of your upper body.

To stand, use your leg muscles to push yourself up, and your arms only to guide you for balance.

To move from a lying to sitting position, roll over onto your side and use your elbows to push up.

Do not allow others to pull your arms or grab you under your armpits when assisting you from sitting to standing or positioning you in bed.

Avoid pulling on stair rails with your arms when going up and down stairs. Use your leg strength instead.

Avoid extremes of reaching with your arms. Place frequently used items within close reach.