Health Facts for you

Exercise and Activity After a Heart Attack

After a heart attack, the damaged heart muscle needs time to heal and allow scar tissue to form. The scar takes about 6 weeks to heal and be strong enough to handle moderate to heavy work. During this time, be sure to avoid any extreme physical and emotional stress; however, it is important to stay active.

How Exercise Can Help You

- Lowers your risk of another heart attack.
- Lowers your blood cholesterol, triglycerides (fats) and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels.
- Increases your HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels.
- Lowers blood pressure.
- Lowers your risk of developing diabetes mellitus.
- Lowers blood sugar levels in people with diabetes mellitus or prediabetes.
- Helps manage weight.
- Lessens stress and improves your emotional well-being.

What is the best kind of exercise to do?
Aerobic exercise will help you get back to an active lifestyle. It involves constant movement of your legs and/or arms. Examples include: walking, biking, swimming, and dancing. Any type of activity that makes you breathe harder and faster for at least 10 minutes at a time is aerobic exercise.

Resistance training helps strengthen major muscle groups and helps burn more calories.

Your Hospital Exercise Program
While in the hospital, you will work with the Cardiac Rehab team to find a program that is right for you. The staff will check your heart rate and blood pressure while you walk. This helps them to know how your body responds to exercise. It also helps them to suggest a starting home exercise program that is best for you.

Your Home Exercise Program
When you first go home, you should follow the guidelines below. Start your home exercise program the day after you go home from the hospital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What activity?</th>
<th>Walk on a level surface or use a stationary bike or treadmill.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often?</td>
<td>Most days of the week (at least 5 days)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How long?</td>
<td>Start with ___ minutes of exercise _____ times a day. Increase your walk or exercise 1-2 minutes each day. Build up to at least 10 minutes, 3 times a day. The ideal goal is to reach 30-45 minutes of continuous exercise per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How hard?</td>
<td>Use the “Talk Test” (see page 3) to gauge how hard you are working.</td>
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</table>
How do I increase my exercise program?

- **Time.** Start with 3-5 minutes of walking 4-5 times/day. Add 1-2 minutes to each session every day. As you add time, the number of sessions can be decreased. For instance, when you complete 10 minutes of exercise, decrease your routine to 2-3 sessions/day. When you complete 30 minutes, decrease to 1 session/day.

- **Intensity.** When you can complete 20-30 minutes of exercise in one session, try to increase your intensity (how fast or hard you walk) for 3-5 minutes at a time. Then resume your normal routine for the rest of your workout. Always keep the Talk Test in mind (see page 3).

For more help go to page 4 or talk with the Cardiac Rehab staff. Their contact information is on the last page of this handout.

**Guidelines When You Reach 20 Minutes of Exercise**

1. **Warm up for 5 minutes** by slowly walking or biking with no resistance. This will increase your blood flow and warm up your muscles for activity.

2. **Increase to a moderate intensity.** Increase your speed or resistance so that you breathe heavier but can still talk.
   - **Walk** a brisk pace. If you must walk uphill, slow down your speed to keep your level of effort and heart rate constant.
   - **Bike** at a moderate pedal speed of 40-50 revolutions per minute (rpm). Once you can do this for 30-40 minutes, then (and only then) tighten the tension knob to increase your workload. Be sure to adjust the seat height so that there is a slight bend in your knee when the pedal is at its lowest level.

3. **Cool down for 5 minutes.** At the end of your session, slow down to an easy pace for 3-5 minutes to avoid sudden changes in blood pressure. This can happen if you stop too quickly.

**How Your Body Responds to Exercise**

You may notice that you breathe faster and your heart rate increases when you exercise. This is normal. You can also expect to sweat and to have some muscle fatigue.

**STOP**

It is also important to know what is NOT normal. If you have any of these symptoms, STOP exercising and call your local doctor. If you feel this is an emergency, call 911 right away.

- Severe chest pain, pressure, or tightness (angina)
- Excessive shortness of breath
- Excessive sweating
- Blurred vision
- Frequent skipped heart beats (palpitations)
- Dizzy or light-headed
- Nausea
- New weakness in an arm or leg or both
**How Long and Hard to Exercise**
Your heart rate and how you feel will guide how long and hard you should exercise and what activities you should do. Since some medicines (such as beta-blockers) lower your heart rate when you exercise, we recommend that you use the Talk Test.

♥ **The Talk Test**
To do the Talk Test, choose a level of exertion that allows you to still talk while you exercise. You should be able to talk in short sentences, but will likely not be able to sing.

**What to Wear When You Exercise**
Wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothes. In warmer weather, a cotton T-shirt and shorts may be enough. In cooler weather, layer your clothes if you plan to exercise outdoors. Your body heat naturally increases as you exercise.

Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf to help warm the air you breathe.

Wear jogging or walking shoes. Shoes with supportive arches can reduce foot and knee soreness that can occur when you exercise for longer times. If you have diabetes mellitus, be sure your shoes have a large enough room in the toe and the heels do not pinch or cause blisters.

**Stairs**
Climbing the stairs can be strenuous. While you heal, you may need to climb stairs at a slower rate. At first, be sure to pace yourself to one stair every 2 seconds. As you heal, you can slowly increase your rate. Step up and down with the leg on your dominant side. If you are right handed, this would be your right leg.

**Activities You Can Expect to Do**
If you have had a cardiac catheterization or stent placed in an artery of your heart, do not lift more than 10 pounds for 7 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The First 6 Weeks After a Heart Attack</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♥ Light housework (dishes, dust, cook)</td>
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<tr>
<td>♥ Home crafts and light carpentry</td>
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<tr>
<td>♥ Drive short distances, ride the lawn mower</td>
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<tr>
<td>♥ Dine out, shop for short times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♥ Light auto work, appliance repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♥ Level walking or outdoor biking at a relaxed speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♥ Climb stairs slowly</td>
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</tbody>
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**Driving**
Talk to your doctor before you drive, do yard work, heavy hammering, heavy arm work or lift more than 30 pounds (young children, armloads of wood, water softener bags, garage doors, shovel snow).

**Sexual Activity**
Unless your doctor or heart care team member has told you otherwise, you may engage in sexual activity one week after your heart attack, if you feel able and have the desire. Some heart medicines can affect your sexual drive and ability. If you have concerns, please ask!

**Be Careful in Extreme Weather**
Heat and humidity can put extra strain on your heart and blood flow. Try not to exercise in direct sun or when it is over 85°F unless the humidity is low, there is a breeze, or there is shade. Early mornings and evenings are best. Exercise outdoors only if the heat index is less than 85°F.
Try not to exercise outdoors when the temperature or wind chill are below 0°F. The body and heart must work harder to walk against wind and snow. Learn to pace yourself and avoid sudden bursts of effort. You may need to rest at intervals to maintain this rating. Exercise should never feel harder than “somewhat hard.”

You may be able to shovel **light snow** after you fully heal, but before you do, warm up and do gentle stretches. Then, pace yourself and take breaks. Use the Talk Test. If you cannot talk in short sentences, you are working too hard. Avoid holding your breath or straining.

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**Your Cardiac Rehab Program**
Cardiac Rehab is a supervised medical program that features exercise and education for people recovering from a heart attack. It is designed to help strengthen your heart and other muscles and to guide you to a heart healthy lifestyle. You can get this follow-up care through the UW Health Cardiac Rehabilitation program or through a program near your home.

Your local Cardiac Rehab program is: _______________________

Phone number: _______________________

UW Health Cardiac Rehabilitation: **(608) 263-6630**