

Exercise and activity for your heart

Why are exercise and activity important?

Exercise and activity are an important part of your recovery.

Exercise and activity will help you:

- strengthen your muscles, heart and lungs
 - relax and reduce the effects of anxiety, stress and/or depression
 - have more energy
 - control your blood pressure
 - lower your blood sugar
 - lower your blood fats
 - control your weight
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What exercise and activity will I do in the hospital?

At first, rest is very important. You will begin more activity by:

- doing some of your own personal care
- getting out of your bed and into a chair
- slowly increasing the amount of walking you do

Stop, rest and tell your nurse or therapist right away if you have these feelings during activity:

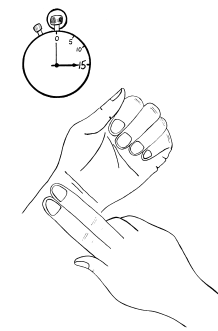
- pain, pressure or tightness in your chest
- shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- feeling faint or lightheaded
- palpitations or feeling your heart is going very fast

Before you go home you will learn:

- to judge how much exercise and activity is right for you
- how to safely increase your exercise and activity
- how to take your pulse as a guide to the level of exercise you should be doing

To take your pulse, follow these steps:

1. Sit and rest for 15 minutes before you take your resting pulse rate.
2. To find your resting pulse rate, put 2 fingers of one hand on the inside of your opposite wrist, just below the thumb. If you have trouble finding your pulse, talk to your nurse or therapist.
3. Count your pulse for 15 seconds. This is your resting 15 second pulse rate.



4. To guide your level of exercise, take your pulse during the activity or exercise:
 - You want your pulse to increase by about 5 beats in 15 seconds.
 - If you take a beta blocker medication, your pulse should only increase by about 3 beats in 15 seconds. Beta blockers are medications that lower your heart rate.

If your pulse is higher than these guidelines, you need to slow down or rest.

Your pulse should never be higher than 30 beats in 15 seconds, or 120 beats in a minute.

5. Tell your doctor, nurse or therapist if you feel any changes in your pulse, such as:
 - pauses
 - sudden fast beats
 - irregular beats

Use your pulse to determine if you are exercising at the right level. Gradually increase your activity when your heart rate or pulse is not increasing (as mentioned above in #4) while you exercise.

If you have a heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation, your pulse will be irregular. You may not be able to use your pulse as a guide. Talk to your nurse or therapist for guidelines.

Another way to monitor your exercise level is the Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale on page 4.

How do I tell if I am exercising at the right level?

The Rating of Perceived Exertion or RPE Scale (see below) is used to measure how easy or hard you find an activity. The numbers on the scale describe how easy or hard an activity feels to you.

The scale has numbers from 0 to 10. For example, 0 (nothing at all) would be how you feel when you are resting in a chair; 8 to 10 would be how you feel when you have finished an exercise stress test.

Try to reach level 3 to 5 on the RPE Scale when you exercise.

The Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale

- 0 Nothing at all, very easy
- 1 Very slight
- 2 Slight
- 3 Moderate**
- 4 Somewhat hard**
- 5 Hard**
- 6
- 7 Very hard
- 8
- 9 Very, very hard (almost maximal)
- 10 Maximal

Use the Exercise Record in this handout to help keep track of your exercise, pulse and RPE Scale rating. Include any symptoms such as shortness of breath and how tired you feel in your legs and body.

**It is important to listen to your body
and work at your own pace!**

What exercise and activity can I do at home?

Stretching

It is important to warm up and stretch your muscles before you exercise.

There are some exercises to help you warm up and stretch at the end of this handout.

Walking

Walking is one of the best types of exercise:

- Wear proper walking shoes to avoid muscle and joint problems.
- Start by walking the same amount of time that you walked in the hospital.
- Walk with someone the first few times. This will help make you and your family confident. It is always a good practice to exercise with someone.
- Plan your walks and start off slowly — even if you can only walk for 5 minutes at a time. Often people find it easier to do a few short walks in a day rather than taking one long walk.
- A shopping mall is a good place to walk. It is climate controlled and the surface is flat. There are often benches along the way to rest.
- Gradually increase the amount of walking you do. Use your pulse as a guide for when to increase your walking speed.
- A good rule to remember is, "Walk so you can talk". If talking is hard to do, you need to slow down.

Stairs

Do not climb stairs as a form of exercise for 6 weeks. It is OK to walk stairs as needed. If you have trouble breathing while climbing stairs:

- stop
 - climb more slowly
 - try taking one step at a time
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Are there any activities I should not do?

These body positions, activities and habits are too much for your heart while it is healing.

Do not do these activities for at least 6 weeks:

- lift or push anything over 4.5 kilograms or 10 pounds – this includes children, pets, groceries, laundry and weights
- garden and cut grass
- shovel snow or dirt
- vacuum
- activities where your arms are kept over your head such as washing windows, painting and hanging decorations – use long-handled tools to make reaching easier
- go in a sauna or hot tub – these activities are not recommended for heart patients due to extreme heat. Talk to your doctor for guidelines.
- swim
- strain or hold your breath – this includes straining on the toilet, or trying to open a window that is stuck

When can I drive?

Usually you can drive after 4 weeks. Ask your doctor.

When can I have sex?

Usually you can have sex after 4 weeks. Ask your doctor.

When can I go back to work?

Most people can return to work and to their regular activities 2 to 3 months after having a heart attack or heart surgery. Ask your doctor about when you can go back to work.

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Exercise and activity at home ...

Once I am home, when should I stop an exercise or activity?

Your body should let you know when you need to slow down or stop.

If you have any angina:

- stop what you are doing
- sit or lie down
- take your nitroglycerin as prescribed – if after 3 tablets or sprays you still have angina pain, call 911 or your local emergency number for an ambulance right away

Stop what you are doing if you have any of the following:

- dizziness or faint feeling
- palpitations or unusual heart beats
- a racing heart
- trouble breathing
- nausea

If these symptoms do not go away with rest, call your doctor, nurse or therapist.

If these symptoms are severe call 911 or your local emergency number for an ambulance right away.

Here are some helpful hints for exercise:

Things to do:

- ✓ Warm up and stretch your muscles before exercising.
- ✓ Wear loose and comfortable clothing.
- ✓ Wear comfortable walking shoes.
- ✓ Walk on a flat surface instead of steep hills and streets.
- ✓ You may use an exercise bike or treadmill. Start with low tension on the bike and a flat surface on the treadmill.
- ✓ Follow the pulse guidelines.
- ✓ Plan to exercise at a time when you feel rested, such as in the morning.
- ✓ Talk to your doctor, nurse or therapist about exercises or activities you may be thinking of doing.
- ✓ Use the Exercise Record in this booklet to record your exercise, pulse and RPE Scale rating.

Things not to do:

- × Exercise on a full stomach – wait 2 hours after a large meal.
 - × Exercise outside in very hot or very cold temperatures.
 - × Exercise in windy weather.
 - × Activities that involve repetitive movements of your arms for 6 to 8 weeks, such as golfing, rowing, using hand weights or a ski machine.
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Remember ...

- ✓ Know your resting pulse rate.
- ✓ Do not let your pulse increase more than 5 beats in 15 seconds with exercise. If you take a Beta Blocker medication, your pulse should not increase more than 3 beats in 15 seconds with exercise.
- ✓ **Your heart rate should never be higher than 30 beats in 15 seconds.**

Your recovery ...

Exercise is an important part of your recovery.

Other important lifestyle changes include:

- stopping smoking
- limiting drinks that contain caffeine to no more than 4 cups per day
- limiting alcohol intake to no more than 1 to 2 drinks per day

Cardiac rehabilitation

The Cardiac Health and Rehabilitation Centre at the Hamilton General Hospital offers a supervised exercise program. If you choose not to join the group classes, a Kinesiologist from this program can design an exercise program for you to do at home. For more information, call 905-577-8033.

Ask your doctor, nurse or therapist for a referral.

Exercise to help you heal

These exercises will help improve your posture and prevent muscle and joint stiffness. Good posture is important to help your lungs expand.

Do all of the exercises in this handout 2 times a day for the first 6 weeks.

When you do an exercise, repeat it 3 times, unless noted otherwise.

Exercise #1

Stand or sit. Place both hands on your belly. Take a deep breath in to expand the belly. Then exhale to contract your belly.



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Exercise #2

Sit or stand with good posture. Keeping your face forward, tip your ear toward your right shoulder. Repeat to the left side.



Exercise #3

Sit or stand with good posture. Turn your head to the right side. Repeat to the left side.

**Exercise #4**

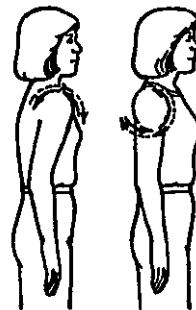
Sit or stand with good posture. Raise your right arm up overhead as far as you can. Repeat with left arm.

**Exercise #5**

Sit or stand with good posture. Pull the right elbow and arm across your chest gently. Repeat with left elbow and arm.

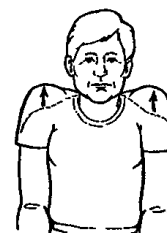
**Exercise #6**

Sit or stand with good posture. Slowly rotate shoulders backward. Then rotate shoulders forward.



Exercise #7

Begin with shoulders relaxed. Hunch shoulders up toward your ears.



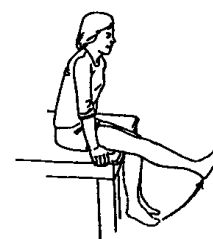
Exercise #8

Sit in a chair with your knees bent as shown. Lift your right foot off floor, slowly lower. Repeat with left foot.



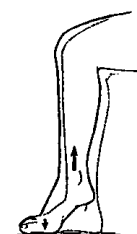
Exercise #9

Sit on the edge of a bed or chair. Straighten right knee fully. Repeat with left knee.



Exercise #10

Sit in a chair with feet touching the floor. Push your toes down and lift your heel. Repeat with other foot.



Exercise #11

Sitting in a chair, keep your heel on the floor and raise the toes up as high as possible. Repeat with other foot.



Pictures for exercises 2 to 11 are used with permission from The Saunders Group Inc.

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