

After Open Heart Surgery: Quick Reference

Royal Columbian Hospital

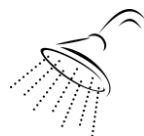
About your follow up appointments

- Make sure you have a good understanding of your follow up appointments before leaving the hospital.
- Once at home, please telephone to arrange your appointments.



Incision Care

- Gently wash around your incisions with mild soap and water.
- **Do not** take a bath for 6 weeks. You can shower at home, as normal. When you shower, do not let the water spray directly onto your incisions.
- Itchiness is a normal part of healing. Do not scratch, rub or use lotions or powders on your incisions until the skin has completely healed.
- Check your incisions for signs of infection. **Call your family doctor if you have any of the following:**
 - thick yellow or green drainage
 - a fever over 38.5°C (101.3F)
 - redness, swelling, or warmth around incisions
 - new pain or pain that does not ease with pain medicine



Protect your breastbone (sternum)

Protect your breastbone for the next 8 weeks (called sternal precautions).

- ✗ **Do not** lift, push, or pull objects that weigh more than 4 kilograms or 10 pounds. (Example: a 4 litre jug of milk weighs about 4 kilograms)
- ✗ **Do not** vacuum, mow lawns, carry heavy groceries, or garden.
- ✗ **Do not** forcefully swing your arms.
- ✗ **Do not** drive for at least 4 weeks.
- ✗ **Do not** lie on your stomach.

Activity

To help you recover:

- Rest and relax.
- Gradually increase activity and exercise.



These activities are safe for you to do:

- Take a bus or cab if you have no one to drive you.
- Attend a cardiac rehabilitation program.
- Resume sexual activities as long as you use the correct way to protect your breastbone (sternal precautions).
- Fly in an airplane.

Diet

- Maintain a heart healthy diet that is low in sodium.
- Choose a good balance of protein, grains, fruits and vegetables.
- If you have diabetes, continue you're your diabetic diet.



Medications

- Fill your prescriptions on the day you leave the hospital.
- Check with your pharmacist about any changes in medications or how much you take. You might still be able to use your previous supply.
- Check with a healthcare provider before taking any medicines not prescribed by your doctor such as herbal medicines or medicines you buy without a prescription.
- If you are prescribed blood thinners, do not stop taking them unless instructed by your doctor.
- Continue to take regular or extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain as needed for the next 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.



After Valve Surgery

- Weigh yourself every day. If your weight increases day by day, contact your family doctor or heart specialist.
- Check your temperature regularly and let your doctor know if you have a fever.
- Tell your dentist and doctor that you had a valve operation and if you are taking blood thinners.



When to get help

Call 9-1-1 if you have any of the following:



- pain similar to heart attack or angina pain
- shortness of breath that does not go away with rest
- signs of stroke:
 - sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg especially on one side
 - sudden confusion and trouble speaking, seeing, understanding and walking
 - severe headache and dizziness with no known cause

Signs of a Stroke

Face	Is it drooping?
Arms	Can you raise both arms?
Speech	Is it slurred or jumbled?
Time	Call 9-1-1 right away.

Resources

- **Recovery After Heart Surgery: In Hospital and At Home** booklet
- **Pacific Open Heart Association**
pacifiopenheart.org 604-436-9005
- **HealthLinkBC**
healthlinkbc.ca 8-1-1
Speak to a registered nurse any time – day or night from anywhere in B.C.
Available in 130 languages. For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.
- **Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon**
heartandstroke.bc.ca 604-736-4404