

After your heart operation

This leaflet explains more about returning to your everyday activities after your heart operation.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

When can I leave hospital?

Before you are discharged you should make sure:

- Sutures / needles are removed
- Your tablets have been explained to you
- You have your medication sheet
- You have your discharge summary
- You have a follow-up appointment
- Your dressings for the day are done

We also ask all patients to kindly complete the friends and family discharge survey before leaving.

After I leave hospital

You may notice the following after leaving hospital:

- Leg swelling - common after surgery and may take one to three weeks to go down. Keep walking and moving all your joints to help – this will also help stop clots forming in your leg (Deep Vein Thrombosis or DVT). You should also keep your legs up (elevated) if you sit down for a long time.
- An emotional reaction to your heart operation, perhaps experiencing a lack of concentration or feelings of irritation. Some people suffer with post-op depression, but this should go away as you physically recover, get more active and feel the benefits of the operation. If your feelings worry you, please see your GP.
- Constipation - the stress surgery puts on your body, your reduced mobility, reduced appetite and/or the side effects of some medication may have slowed down your bowel habits. You may be sent home with some laxatives to help your bowel habits return to normal. If you continue to feel constipated please see your GP.

It's also important to remember when you get home that:

- Sleep and rest are important. Try to keep a day and night routine and sleep however you feel most comfortable (on your side or back). Try to change position throughout the night. You may find your breathing easier if you use some extra pillows to help you sit up slightly.
- Your appetite may be reduced after an operation and will gradually improve over a few weeks. It's still important you have a good, healthy diet and get plenty of nutrition over the next four to six weeks to allow your body to heal. If you are diabetic, please monitor your blood sugars until you return to your normal diet and routine.

The main pointers of a cardiac-healthy diet are:

- Have at least two to three portions of oily fish per week
- have at least five portions of fruit or veg per day
- eat plenty of starch and fibre
- reduce your fat intake (especially saturated fat)
- reduce sugar
- reduce salt
- limit your alcohol intake (especially if you are on Warfarin).

Looking after my wound

If you go home with any wound dressings a district nurse will come to change them for you at home.

Most sutures are dissolvable but a few may not be - please check your entire body before you go home.

Uncovered wounds can be washed as normal – make sure you are gentle.

You should monitor your wounds for any sign of infection, and contact your GP if you notice any pus, worsening or spreading redness, worsening pain, heat at your wound site or foul smells.

Will I be in pain?

Pain is common after heart surgery and may get slightly worse over the next few weeks as you get more active. This is not a reason to stop being active.

Your nurse will talk through your pain killers with you before you go home.

Keep on top of your pain by taking the medication you are given and contact your GP if this pain relief is not enough.

Good pain relief will help you stay comfortable and make it easier to take deep breaths, to cough and to move around - important for recovery.

If you are still coughing when you go home, make sure you use the supported technique you have been shown on the ward - crossing your arms over your chest to help with pain control.

Will I need to do any specific exercises?

You will be referred to the cardiac rehabilitation team by the ward when you are discharged. Details may differ at your local hospital.

Cardiac rehabilitation is an eight week programme involving exercise, relaxation, educational talks and looking at risk factors after your cardiac event.

Each weekly session will last for about two and a half hours and will include:

- assessment by a member of the specialist nursing team, who will measure your blood pressure, heart rate and discuss with you any concerns you may have
- a warm up
- a 10 station exercise circuit including a range of cardiovascular and resistance exercises
- a cool down
- a relaxation session
- an educational talk given by one of the multidisciplinary team members, on topics such as diet or medications
- a chance to ask our specialists any questions you have.

When can I get back to normal activities?

When you can **return to work** depends on the job you do. Try to restart on short days and light duties and gradually build this up over a couple of weeks. If you sit at a desk for long periods of time try to get up and move around every 20-30 minutes.

The DVLA states **no driving** for one month and only to return to driving once you have permission from your GP and are able to safely control a vehicle. You don't need to inform the DVLA of your operation, but if you have had a pacemaker or ICD, see the DVLA website for more details.

Your main **physical activity** should be walking. Find a comfortable level and build it up gradually over the weeks. You should avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling for three months to allow the incision in your breast bone to heal. Carrying small everyday things such as a kettle is fine. After your operation you may feel discomfort in your chest and shoulders as muscles and ligaments have been stretched during the operation. If you had a graft taken from your leg, make sure you get your foot flat on the ground and walk normally.

You should not do any of the following for the next four weeks:

- gym
- cycling
- hoovering
- DIY
- driving
- gardening
- walking dogs
- swimming.

You can start to do housework and DIY again after four to six weeks – make sure you start easy and gradually build this up.

You can resume sex again at any time but should begin passively and gradually build this up over a few weeks.

What should I do if I have a problem?

You can contact the ward with questions at any time on 020 8725 1508, but it may be better to contact your GP as unfortunately you can't come back onto the ward.

If your GP is closed and you feel it is urgent, many walk-in centres can help (see the NHS Choices Website: www.nhs.uk to find your nearest one).

If it is an emergency go to your nearest emergency department (ED or A&E or dial 999 (you do not need to come to St George's).

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will need to book a routine appointment with your GP for two weeks after your discharge.

Useful sources of information

If you would like further information or support please visit the **British Heart Foundation Website** on <https://www.bhf.org.uk/>, or contact your GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about returning to your everyday activities after your heart operation, please contact the ward on 020 8725 1508. Available 7 days a week.

If you would like to make a contribution to the ward or to thank the team or a particular member of staff, please speak to the ward sister who can give you more information. All letters and e-mails will be shared with the team.

Please email rachel.eaton2@stgeorges.nhs.uk or write to:

Rachel Eaton
Ward sister
Benjamin Weir ward
St George's Hospital (AMW)
Blackshaw Road
Tooting
London
SW17 0QT.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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