

# Getting moving again after your heart surgery

The British Heart foundation booklet gives you a general idea of what to expect after your operation. The information below advises you on physical activity following your operation. Please do the following after your surgery to ensure as rapid a recovery as possible.

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

## Positioning

After surgery you are at risk of developing chest complications. Sitting out in a chair on the day after surgery will help to prevent this. During the day you are advised to avoid lying flat on your back or in a slumped position. At night, whilst sleeping, please lie in a position that is comfortable for you.

## Coughing

After surgery, phlegm may collect in your lungs. It is important to clear this as it may lead to chest complications in the first few days after your operation. Your chest wound may be uncomfortable when coughing and supporting the wound when coughing will make this more comfortable.



To support your wound, place your hands over your chest and apply firm pressure. Your pain should be controlled to allow you to cough. If you are unable to cough because of pain, please inform a nurse or a doctor.

## Walking

You are encouraged to walk regularly after your operation to help your recovery. A nurse will tell you when you are ready to start walking. This is usually on the second day after your operation and if necessary your nurse will assist you during your first few walks. You may even start walking to the toilet the evening of the first day after your operation. As soon as you feel confident to walk by yourself, please do so. If you wish to leave the ward then please let your nurse know first. Over the next few days, try to increase the speed, frequency and distance of your walks. Before discharge home you should aim to be walking regularly on the ward throughout the day.

## General mobility exercises

After your operation it is not unusual to experience some discomfort both in your chest and in your shoulders.

Muscles and ligaments have been stretched during the operation and you will feel stiff for the first few days.

You are encouraged to move your neck and shoulders freely from the first day after your surgery. It is fine to move your arms up above your head.



You may also feel discomfort over the graft sites such as the forearm or leg. You are asked to move all joints around these areas to avoid unnecessary stiffness and if you have had a graft taken from your leg, please walk on it normally. You are advised to move your ankles regularly, pointing your toes up and down until you are fully mobile on the ward. This is to help prevent a clot forming in your leg known as a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

If you have had an incision through your breast bone please avoid using your arms to push up or support yourself when you stand up or sit

down. A good way to do this is to place your arms across your chest. It takes three months for your breast bone to fully heal, so we want you to avoid any excessive pressure going through your arms to your chest.

### **Physiotherapy**

Many patients undergoing cardiothoracic surgery will not need to see a physiotherapist routinely. The surgical team or nurses may refer you to physiotherapy if you experience difficulties with your breathing or walking that require specialist assistance.

The ward nurses will refer you for cardiac rehabilitation on discharge.

### **Useful sources of information**

The British Heart Foundation website: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

Benjamin Weir Ward - 020 8725 1508

Cardiac Rehabilitation Department at St George's Hospital -  
020 8725 1396

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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### **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 wings (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto: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](http://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

## AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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