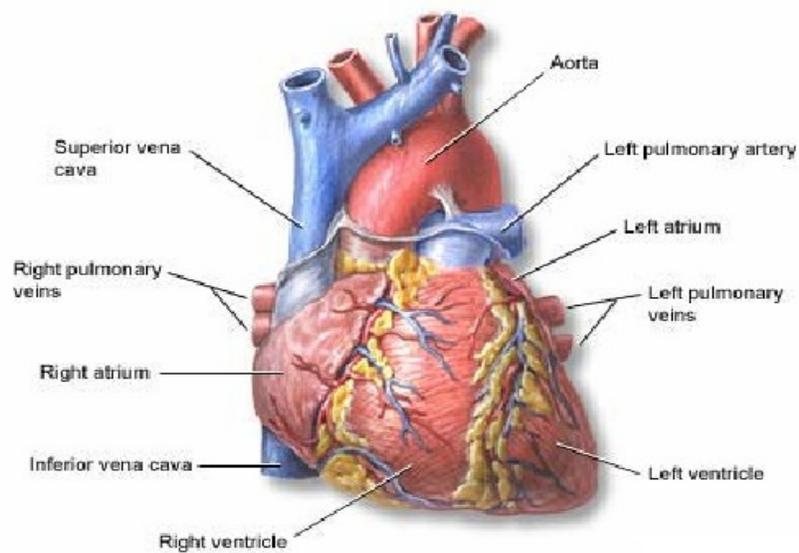


# After Heart Surgery

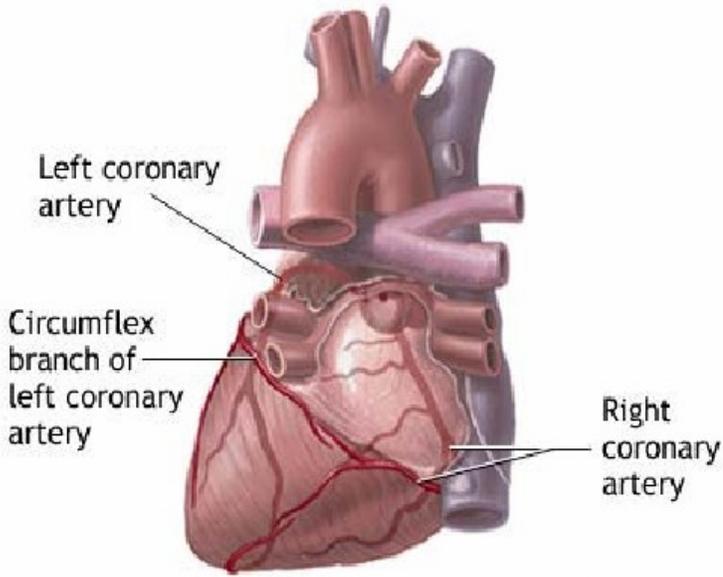
*A Patient's Guide to Recovery*

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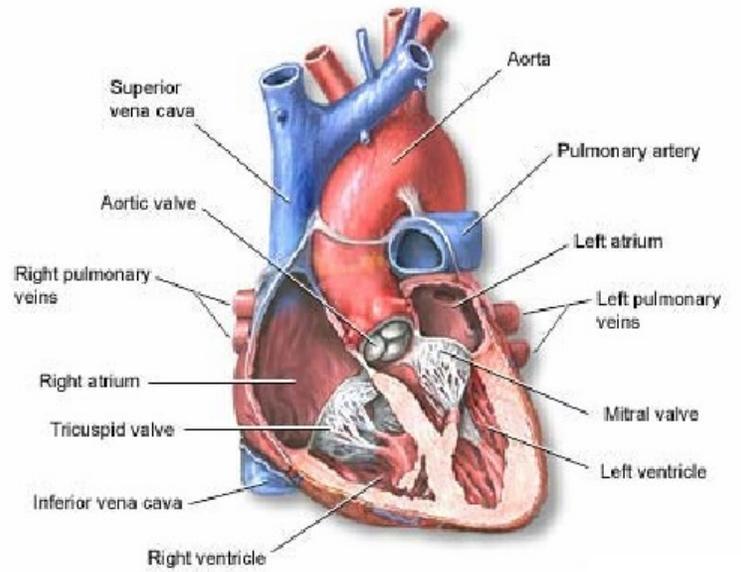
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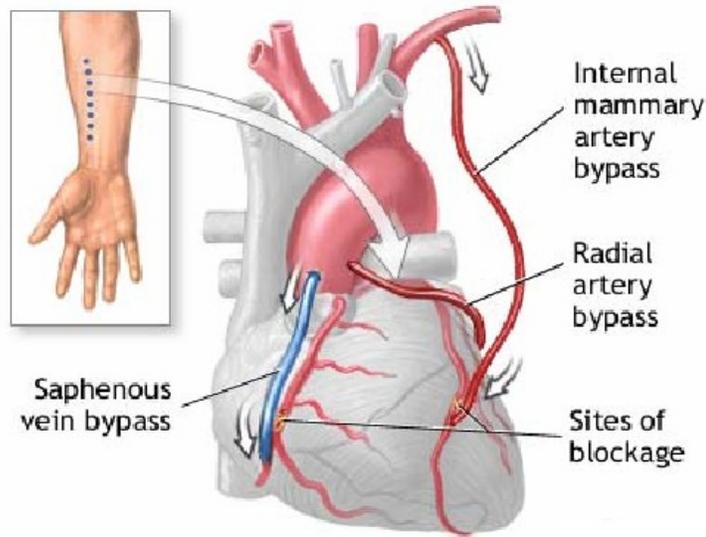
Front of the Heart



Back of the Heart



Inside the Heart



Bypass Grafts

## After Surgery

Over one half million Americans each year have heart surgery to relieve symptoms and prolong their lives. These surgeries include coronary bypass surgery, repair or replacement of heart valves, dysrhythmia surgery, repair of congenital defects and other heart surgeries.

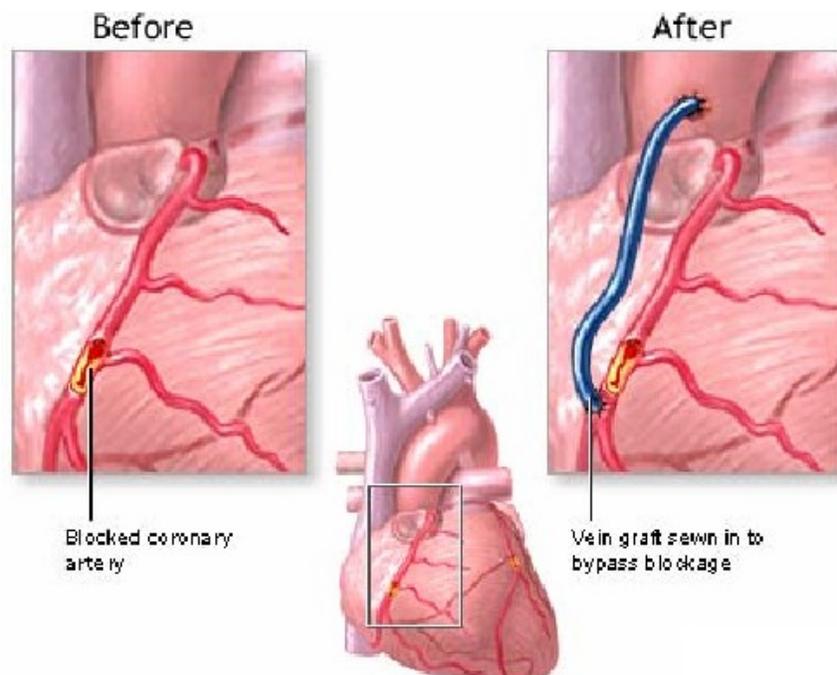
Recover from heart surgery requires a four to seven day stay in the hospital including one to two days in the intensive care unit (ICU). You will have several tubes to drain fluid from your chest plus lines in your neck and wrist to monitor your heart function. These will be removed one to four days after surgery. You will also have a catheter in your bladder to drain urine and monitor your kidney function. This will be removed when you are ready to leave ICU.

Once you are transferred out of ICU you will begin a cardiac rehabilitation program. The initial phase (I) of the program begins in the hospital. You will continue with phase II once you are discharged from the hospital as an outpatient. Cardiac rehab is an exercise program designed specifically for heart patients where their activity level is monitored while they exercise. It is important that you participate in this program to help your body recover from surgery and regain your strength.

## Recovery from Surgery

It takes approximately four to six weeks to start feeling better after heart surgery. The full benefits from the operation may not be determined until three to six months after surgery.

Each individual responds differently to surgery. No one can predict how your body will respond to surgery or how quickly it will heal. You may have special strengths such as a strong family support system, a healthy immune system or deep spiritual faith that impact how you cope with your recovery.



## **Care of Your Incisions**

After discharge from the hospital, it is okay to wash your incisions with mild soap and warm water. Avoid vigorous scrubbing. Do not take a tub bath, use a whirlpool or go into a swimming pool until the incisions have completely healed or until about 6-8 weeks after surgery. Take a shower in warm not hot water. You may sit on the edge of a bath tub or use a shower chair if you feel weak.

The incisions may sunburn easily and should not be exposed to direct sunlight for the first year after surgery. The scar will pigment more (be darker) if exposed to sun. Do not apply lotions, creams, oils, or powders on your incisions unless prescribed by the doctor or his staff.

Check your incisions every day. It is normal to have some swelling and redness at the incision site. Notify the surgeon if you notice increased redness, swelling or tenderness on or around the incision, drainage from the incision or a fever greater than 102°F.

## **Medications**

You will be given prescriptions for the medications you need to take once you are discharged from the hospital. These medications may be different from the ones you were taking before surgery. Take the medications exactly as prescribed by the doctor. Do not take other medicines without first notifying the physician. Keep a current list of your medicines, dosages and times you take them in your wallet or purse. Bring this list to your doctor appointments.

You will also be given a prescription for pain pills. Do not hesitate to take them. The pain pills may not totally relieve the pain but can make the pain tolerable. This will allow you to exercise, and help you rest. You may take over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil), or naproxen (Aleve) in addition to or instead of the pain pills. However, several prescription pain medications contain acetaminophen. Check with your doctor's office before taking additional acetaminophen.

Refills for prescription pain pills will be approved for the first two months after surgery. If you require pain pills for longer than this period, please contact your primary care physician or cardiologist.

## **What to Expect After Surgery**

It is normal to notice an occasional "clicking" noise or sensation in your chest for the first few days after surgery. This should occur less over time and go away completely within three to four weeks after surgery. If it gets worse, please call your surgeon's office.

You may have a lump at the top of your chest incision. This will flatten and disappear with time.

It is normal to have problems with constipation after surgery. This is due to the pain medications and inactivity. Use a stool softener or laxative of your choice. Add more fiber such as

fruits and vegetables to your diet. The constipation will resolve as you become more active and resume your normal routine and diet.

If you have an incision in your leg, you may notice some swelling in that leg. Keeping your legs elevated when resting and after exercise will help reduce the swelling. If you were given elastic TED hose while in the hospital, wear them for the first two weeks after surgery. You may leave the hose off at night. The swelling should decrease when you elevate your leg, but might recur when standing. Notify the surgeon's office if the swelling becomes worse.

It is normal not to have much of an appetite after surgery. It takes several weeks for your appetite to return. You may also notice that your sense of taste and smell have been affected. All of these things will return to normal in a few weeks.

You may have difficulty sleeping at night. This may be caused by pain and by the interruption of your normal sleep pattern while you were in the hospital. Taking a pain pill at night may help you relax. Your sleep pattern will gradually return to normal as your body heals.

You will have good days and bad days. You may have mood swings and feel depressed. Do not become discouraged. This will disappear with time.

It is normal to experience muscle pain or tightness in your shoulders and upper back. The pain medication will help relieve this discomfort. The pain will get better over time.

You may also have areas of numbness in your chest. This is normal and will improve with time.

Low grade fevers may occur on occasion. This is caused by the healing process and not taking deep breaths. Use the breathing device you received in the hospital at least 4 times a day.

## **Activities**

*Dress:* Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes that do not put pressure or rub on your incisions. Women should wear a loose fitting bra to support their breasts.

*Rest:* You need to balance exercise with rest for your recovery. Plan to rest between activities and take short naps as necessary.

*Exercise:* Walking is the best form of exercise because it increases circulation throughout the body and to the heart muscle. Walk three times a day for 5-10 minutes each time. Walk at a slow pace and rest when you are tired. If the weather is bad (rain, snow, temperature below 40 or above 90), walk indoors.

*Stairs:* Climb stairs at a slow pace, one step at a time. Stop and rest if you become tired or short of breath. Use your legs and do not pull on the handrail.

*Upper body restrictions:* Do not lift, push or pull on anything over 10 lbs for six weeks. Do not perform activities that require you to reach above your shoulders. The breastbone takes 6-8 weeks to heal. Such activities could cause the breastbone to not heal properly.

Breathing exercises: Use the breathing device given to you in the hospital at least four times a day for 10 breaths each time. This will help your lungs and increase the oxygen to your heart to help it heal. It will also help to prevent pneumonia.

Driving: You may ride as a passenger in a car at any time. Wear your seat belt. Avoid bicycles and motorcycles for at least 6 weeks. You may resume short distance driving (30 minutes) 3-4 weeks after surgery or once you no longer require pain pills during the daytime. When traveling long distances, get out of the car every 2 hours to walk around for a few minutes. Wear your support hose if flying or riding in the car for long distances.

Sex: You may resume sexual relations when you feel comfortable. Do not use a position that puts pressure on your chest.

Work: If your job requires light duty such as desk or computer work, you may resume work approximately 4-6 weeks after surgery. Do not resume work until 6-8 weeks after surgery if your job requires lifting or carrying anything more than 10 lbs, or your job is stressful.

Visitors: Limit your visitors for the first 2-3 weeks after surgery. If you become tired, excuse yourself and lie down. Do not allow people with colds, flu or other communicable diseases to visit; talk to them on the phone instead.

Weight: Weigh yourself every morning at the same time after you urinate and before you eat breakfast. Keep a record of your weight. Notify the doctor if you gain 2 or more pounds overnight.

## **Diet and Exercise**

Diet: For the first few weeks after surgery you will need to follow a no added or low salt diet. Your body will have a tendency to retain fluid and salt makes this condition worse. Avoid adding salt in cooking and at the table.

Exercise: Besides your daily walking, you are encouraged to enroll in cardiac rehab. This program was started while you were in the hospital when the nurses or aides walked you in the halls and monitored your heart while you exercised.

Phase II cardiac rehab requires physician referral and begins one to two weeks after you are discharged from the hospital. This phase helps you to return to a normal active life, provides education and improves functional capacity and endurance. Your heart will be monitored while you exercise. You will be required to attend three times a week for approximately 8 to 12 weeks.

Each session consists of warm-up exercises followed by aerobic exercise on the treadmill or bicycle, then weight training with light weights.

Education sessions focus on cardiac risk factors, diet, medications, and heart healthy exercise. You will be taught how to monitor your heart rate during exercise and how to monitor your physical activity outside of rehab.

The cardiac rehab program is covered by Medicare and most insurance companies. Call the cardiac rehab of your choice and have them fax us their referral form. We will fill this out and return it to them.

### **When to Call the Doctor**

***Go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911 for any of the following:***

- Chest pain similar to pain before surgery
- Heart rate faster than 150 beats per minute or less than 40 beats per minute or an irregular heart rhythm that persists more than one hour
- Severe shortness of breath
- Coughing up lots of bright red blood
- Sudden weakness in arms or legs, slurred speech, or fainting spells
- Black, tarry stools
- Severe abdominal pain

***For the first 4 weeks after discharge from the hospital, call the surgeon's office for any of the following\*:***

- Temperature above 102°F.
- Weight gain of 2 lbs from one day to the next or 5 lbs over one week.
- Worsening shortness of breath
- Repeated episodes of an irregular heart rhythm with or without shortness of breath
- Persistent bleeding or oozing from incisions
- Incisions that are reddened, warm to touch, swollen, or drain pus
- Urinary tract infection—frequent urination, burning with urination, bloody urine
- Pain and swelling in the calf that becomes worse

\* Please call your primary care physician or cardiologist for any problems you experience four or more weeks after surgery.