Life After Cardiac Surgery

What to expect and how to recover

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Recovery is individual

- Feeling tired, uncomfortable or emotional can be part of recovery.
- Progress varies with the operation and your general health.
- Use your own discharge plan and ask the cardiac rehabilitation team when uncertain.

Common early experiences

- Fatigue and reduced stamina
- Aches and discomfort around the chest, back or shoulders
- Changes in sleep, mood and appetite
- Pace activities and take prescribed pain relief; seek advice if symptoms worsen.

Activity and driving

- Begin with gentle walking and build up gradually as advised.
- After a breastbone incision, avoid heavier carrying, pushing, pulling and housework during healing.
- Leeds advises waiting at least six weeks before driving after bypass or valve surgery.
- Check your operation-specific advice, fitness to drive and insurance cover.

Wounds and breastbone

- Contact your cardiac rehabilitation nurse or GP promptly for increasing redness, warmth, swelling, pain or wound discharge.
- Ask for assessment if the breastbone feels unstable or clicking becomes worse.
- Do not assume that a new or worsening symptom is a normal after-effect.

When to seek help

- Contact your care team or GP for fever, a concerning wound, worsening breathlessness, new palpitations or swelling.
- Use the urgent contact instructions in your discharge paperwork.
- For severe or sudden symptoms, seek urgent medical help.

A gradual return

- In the first days at home, rest as needed and take short walks.
- Build up activity at a pace guided by symptoms and your rehabilitation team.
- There is no single recovery timetable; Leeds notes that feeling back to normal can take two to three months.
- Ask for individual advice about work, exercise and other activities.

Supporting recovery

- Take medicines as prescribed.
- Follow your walking and cardiac rehabilitation plan.
- Eat well and ask for help with everyday tasks when needed.
- Discuss low mood or anxiety with your care team or GP.

Key points

- Recovery is gradual and differs between people.
- Know whom to contact if symptoms or wounds concern you.
- Your own discharge instructions take priority over general information.
- This presentation is for education and does not replace individual clinical advice.

Further information

- For individual advice, follow the instructions provided by your surgical and cardiac rehabilitation teams.
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust: Your journey through heart surgery.
- www.leedsth.nhs.uk/patients/resources/your-journey-through-heart-surgery-2/