For Your Well Being

Care After a Heart Attack

For the first couple of days at home, you may be as active as you were on the last day at the hospital. Do not be surprised or upset if you feel weak in the first days of recovery.

**Activity:**

Try to balance your activity with rest. Space your activities to allow time for your heart to rest. This is important in your first week at home.

- Plan ahead – do easy tasks in between harder ones.
- Limit activities with pushing and pulling.
- Rest when you need to; listen to your body.
- Limit lifting to 10 pounds or less for about 2 weeks.
- Resume driving only after any weakness and lightheadedness goes away. These symptoms may be common as your medications are adjusted.

Your health care provider can address any other specific questions you have.

**Diet:**

Try to achieve and maintain a weight that is normal for your height, body build, and age. Every pound of excess weight puts a strain on your heart. Eat slowly and avoid large meals. Allow for a rest after eating but avoid laying flat in bed. Resting for 30 minutes after you eat is good since your heart is working harder to digest your food.

- A “Heart Healthy Diet” includes foods that are low in fat and cholesterol.
- Limit drinks with caffeine and alcohol, which can interfere with some medications.
- Ask your doctor about seeing a dietitian to assist with your meal planning. The library and Internet can be good resources for more information on a heart healthy diet as well.

**Medications:**

Certain medications are taken to improve the way your heart pumps over time. Others are taken to relieve symptoms. A medication schedule will be given to you on discharge.

- Get your medications refilled before you run out.
- Never stop taking a medication or change the dose, even if you feel better.
- Only your health care provider can prescribe the proper dosage, make changes, or stop your medications.

**Checking your weight:**

*Weigh yourself every day…*

- At the same time every morning, wearing the same amount of clothes.
- After you empty your bladder and before you eat breakfast.
- Always use the same scale.
- Write it down each day.

Call your doctor if you gain 3 or more pounds in 2 days, or if you gain 5 pounds in 1 week.

**Exercise:**

Phase II Cardiac Rehab can help you regain your confidence and find out what activity level is best for you. Ask your health care provider about joining a cardiac rehab program. Check with your insurance about coverage for this program.
Your feelings: What you can expect

- Even if you felt great when leaving the hospital, expect to be tired when you return home.
- Do not be surprised when you feel weak and tired. This is normal in your healing process. Listen to your body and rest when you need to.
- When you go home, you will no longer be “sheltered” from your usual environment. You will return to the events of your day-to-day life. This may increase stress and anxiety, especially while you are trying to cope and heal from the entire experience.
- Mood changes are normal as you heal. Let your family and friends support you. Talk about your mood and your concerns. It can be hard to understand and accept all that has happened to you in the last few days. Talking about it is a great way to help relieve your anxiety.
- Coping and coming to terms with your heart problem is a very important part of your recovery.

About tobacco:

- Avoid second-hand smoke whenever you can.
- If you smoke, quitting now could help you live longer and more comfortably.
- Smoking increases your risk of having another heart attack. It constricts your blood vessels and decreases blood flow to the heart muscle.

Call your doctor if you have:

- Sudden onset of chest pain, not relieved by nitroglycerin or rest
- Angina, or chest pains that occur more often and are more severe (they may occur along with other symptoms listed here)
- Marked shortness of breath
- Palpitations (rapid heart beat or skipped beats)
- Sudden weight gain, 3 or more pounds in 2 days, or 5 pounds in 1 week
- Swelling in your legs and feet
- Unable to lie flat in bed (due to shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing)
- Extreme fatigue or profuse sweating
- Frequent dizziness, lightheadedness or feeling faint
- A very slow heart rate (less than 50 beats per minute) consistently
- Any other unusual symptoms
- Any other problems with medication

If you think it is an emergency, call 911.

Follow-up care:

Refer to your discharge instructions for appointments and follow-up care that is advised.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health care problem.