

Surgery

STERNOTOMY RECOVERY GUIDE

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Each patient's recovery after open heart surgery will be slightly different, but the following guide will give you an idea of what to expect from the moment you wake up from surgery to your last follow-up visit.

Open heart surgery is performed by opening your breastbone or sternum, also called a sternotomy. It will take you two to three months to fully recover from this procedure. You should plan to be away from work for approximately 12 weeks while you get your full strength back.

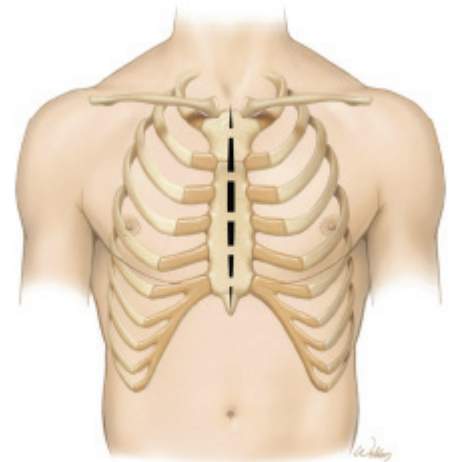
IMMEDIATELY AFTER SURGERY

After surgery, your anesthesiology and surgery team will accompany you to the Cardiovascular Critical Care (CVCC) unit.

Breathing tube

For your safety, your breathing tube will still be in place in your mouth when you wake up. This can be frightening, because you won't be able to speak, and it may feel uncomfortable. Try to relax, breathe normally and let the breathing machine (called a ventilator) do the work and breathe for you. Your doctor will have the tube removed as soon as you can breathe well on your own.

After the breathing tube is removed, you may feel groggy and disoriented. If you feel chilly or like your stomach is upset, ask your nurse to help you get comfortable. You will also receive pain medication to control your pain.



Median sternotomy incision

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Other tubes and wires

You will notice the following:

- EKG wires on your chest to record the activity of your heart
- A monitor on your finger to measure the oxygen in your blood
- Intravenous (IV) lines for pain medication and fluids, and a special IV in your neck to measure heart function
- Catheter in your bladder
- Possibly tubes and wires coming from your chest to help your heart recover– these will be removed in the next few days
- Possibly straps to restrain your arms or pads on your hands (if you were pulling at your tubes and cords while waking up)

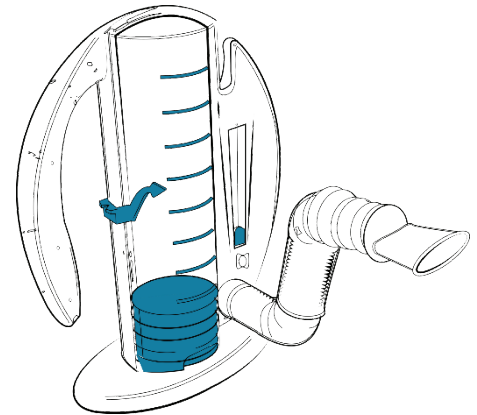
Lung strength

Your lungs may be weak after surgery, so it's important to get them back in shape. To do this, you may be asked to take deep breaths, cough a lot and press a pillow against your chest as you cough so your incision hurts less

An incentive spirometer will also be given to you to help guide you to take deep breaths. This helps expand your lungs after surgery and prevents infection and fluid from building up in your lungs. You will also take this home with you and continue to use it after surgery. This device helps you in a very important part of your recovery and is your friend. It can help you go home faster!

To use:

1. Put the mouthpiece in your mouth.
2. Breathe in slowly and as deep as you can.
3. Hold the breath for as long as you can.
4. Slowly let the air out.
5. Do this 10 times every hour.



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Pain management

Your nurse will give you pain medication. You may also have a pain pump with a button that allows you to give yourself a dose of IV pain medication. If so, only YOU can use it, not your visitors or family. It is important for you to let your nurses know your pain level so that they can give your pain medications at the right time.

YOUR HOSPITAL STAY

After your stay in the CVCC unit, you will move to another area for continued monitoring and recovery. They will also review how to best care for your incision. As soon as you're ready, a nurse will help you get up and walk. Walking around helps prevent blood clots from forming in your legs and helps you regain strength. Your hospital stay, typically five to 10 days, will be personalized based on your procedure and progress. Your surgery team will keep you informed of your expected discharge as you recover. Your surgery team will continuously collaborate with the hospital's social workers and case managers to arrange any rehab or home health needs for your discharge.

CONTINUED RECOVERY AT HOME

When it's time to go home, your care team will review all the medications that you'll need at home. If there is anything you don't understand, please don't hesitate to ask questions so that you have all the information before going home. You will also receive discharge paperwork with specific instructions to follow. Please read through all of this.

Follow Up Visits

Make an appointment to follow up with your primary care physician (PCP) or cardiologist within one week of your discharge. They need to see how you are recovering, check your incision site and manage your medications appropriately. If you have stitches that still need to be removed (from your incision or a chest tube site), our surgery team will collaborate with you to identify the most convenient medical provider to remove the stitches based on your location.

Cardiac Rehab

Your cardiologist will also order cardiac rehabilitation if it is appropriate for you. This typically starts one month after surgery. Cardiac rehab is designed to help patients with heart disease recover faster from cardiac surgical procedures, maximize quality of life and return to full and productive lives. Your heart rhythm, pulse rate, blood pressure and blood oxygen level will be monitored during each session.

Please discuss any activities, exercises, or sports that you enjoy with your surgery team so that they can give you specific instructions on how to return to these activities safely.

Activity

- Walk as much as comfort allows. It's a great way to regain strength and help prevent blood clots in your legs. Walking for 15-20 minutes, three to four times per day is a great start.
- Do NOT lift anything over 20 pounds!
- Do not drive until your doctor tells you that it's safe to do so, typically around six weeks after surgery.
- However, you can ride as a passenger in a car at any time. If you are traveling a long distance as a passenger, get out of the car at least every two hours, stretch and walk for a few minutes.

Bathing

- To help prevent an infection, keep your incision overall clean and dry. It is safe to shower and get the incision wet with running water once you get home. You may get tired easily and may need the assistance of a shower chair to sit or take a break.
- Use a gentle, unscented soap (baby shampoo, CeraVe, Aquaphor, Aveno). Avoid the use of perfumed lotions or soaps. Pat dry gently.
- Do not soak the incision underwater until your doctor says it's okay (six weeks minimal).
- Do not go swimming or take baths until your doctor says it's okay.

If you have urgent surgical concerns, or concerns after hours, please call the office number. The answering service will connect you with the on-call surgeon.

Call your surgery team right away if you have:



- A fever of 101°F or higher
- Pain that does not get better with medication
- A fast or irregular heartbeat that does not go away
- Pain, redness or swelling in one or both legs
- Nausea, or if you can't keep food down
- Drainage from your incision
- Swelling in your hands, ankles or stomach

If you experience anything unusual or something just feels wrong, don't be afraid to call.

Call 911, or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you experience the following:

- Sudden, severe shortness of breath
- Sudden, severe chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid, irregular heartbeat
- Changes in your speech, difficulty concentrating or weakness on one side of your body.

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