



Activity Guidelines after a Heart Attack or Surgery

This leaflet is designed to give you a guide for physical activity during the first few weeks after a heart attack or having cardiac surgery. It is important to slowly increase your physical activity to give your heart time to heal. Everyone recovers at a different pace and to help avoid further problems you will need to be aware of signs that you are over doing the activity. A good level of intensity is if you can comfortably talk at the same time as doing the activity. Remember to have a ready supply of anginine and take it with you if you go out. Balance physical activity with rest; take time to rest if you feel tired. Your aim is to build up to 30 minutes or more of physical activity on all or most days of the week. It also helps to have someone join in with you for companionship and to make it fun.

Walking is a great form of planned physical activity, which can be used to improve your physical fitness. It is important however in the first few weeks to:

- Avoid walking up steep hills, keep to relatively flat ground.
- Avoid walking in the heat of the day or into a strong wind.

If you experience chest pain at any time you should stop, rest and use anginine if it has been prescribed for you.

Week 1

Do only simple activities around your home, get dressed, and make simple meals. Aim for an activity level similar to what you were doing in hospital. Try to limit your visitors if they tire you out easily. Walk between 5 – 10 minutes twice a day, at a comfortable pace, on flat ground.

Week 2

You can start to do light household activities like watering, washing dishes. Go out for dinner or visit friends, even a short trip to the do some shopping. Walk between 10 – 15 minutes twice a day at a comfortable pace, on flat ground.

Week 3

Begin to do more intensive household activities like sweeping, ironing, weeding. Walk around 20 minutes a day; you can begin to walk up slight slopes. You can sometimes begin to drive again. Talk with your doctor about this and check with your insurance company about their policies. When driving stick to familiar routes and short distances until your confidence increases and you are feeling better.

Week 4

Increase your household activities again, normal meal preparation, vacuuming, making beds, light woodworking. You can play darts, bowls, and snooker and go swimming. Walk up to 25 minutes a day, including small hills.

Darwin
Shop 1 & 2 Tiwi Place,
Tiwi NT 0810
PO Box 40113,
Casuarina NT 0811
Phone: 08 8927 8488
Fax: 08 8927 8515
E: info@
healthylivingnt.org.au

Alice Springs
Jock Nelson Centre,
7/16 Hartley Street,
Alice Springs NT 0870
Phone: 08 8952 8000
Fax: 08 8952 7000
E: alicesprings@
healthylivingnt.org.au

www.healthylivingnt.org.au
ABN 11 374 693 055

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Week 5

Increase the intensity of activities like swimming, or go wharf fishing (no deep sea). Walk up to 30 minutes once or twice daily, increasing pace if done easily.

Week 6

Return to work as able and as directed by your doctor. Check with doctor about manual labour or competitive sports (sometime may be between 6 – 8 weeks after a heart attack). Continue to walk or participate in at least 30 minutes of regular physical activity. You can begin golf practice.

Week 7 onwards

Do normal activities. Walk or participate 30 minutes or more of regular physical activity on all or most days of the week.

Sexual Activity

Sexual activity can be resumed when you feel able and comfortable with it. Generally sexual activity can be resumed if you are able to walk up 2 flights of stairs, or walk a kilometre. If you feel short of breath or get any chest discomfort, slow down or stop. Use whatever position is most comfortable and rest afterwards. Try not to have sex after a heavy meal, excessive alcohol consumption, exercise or if you are already tired.

If you do get any symptoms during any activity follow your Angina Management Plan and report to your doctor.

For any more information please contact the Cardiac Educator at Healthy Living NT.

Based on “Activity Guidelines following a Heart Attack”, Ashford Hospital Adelaide and “Building Healthy Hearts”, St Andrews Hospital Brisbane and with assistance from Territory Sports Medicine.