Cardiac Rehabilitation

Cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) is a program of exercise and psychological support. The goal is to have a stronger heart and a lifetime of better health. This type of rehab will help you make lifestyle changes. Cardiac rehab is about learning how to improve your life and reduce your risk of future problems. People who participate in cardiac rehab programs get better faster and avoid returning to the hospital as often.

You may be referred to a cardiac rehab program to help with problems such as:

- After a heart attack.
- After a procedure to open blocked blood vessels.
- Open heart surgery.
- Heart failure.
- Peripheral artery disease (PAD).
- Coronary artery disease (CAD).
- Angina.
- Lung or breathing problems.
- Cardiomyopathy.
- Before heart transplant.
- Aneurysm repair.

CARDIAC REHAB MAY HELP YOU:

- Reduce problems like chest pain and trouble breathing.
- Change risk factors such as:
  - Smoking.
  - High blood pressure.
  - High cholesterol.
  - Diabetes.
  - Being out of shape or not active.
  - Weighing more than 30% over your ideal weight.
  - Using drugs such as cocaine or amphetamines.
- Improve your mental outlook so you feel:
  - Less depressed or “blue.”
  - More hopeful.
  - Better about yourself.
  - More confident about taking care of yourself.
- Get support from experts as well as other people with similar problems.
- Learn how to manage and understand your medicines.
- Teach your family about your condition and how to participate in your recovery.

WHAT HAPPENS IN CARDIAC REHAB?

You will be assessed by a cardiac rehab team who will check your health history and do a physical exam. You may need blood tests, stress tests and other evaluations. You may **not** start a cardiac rehab program if:

- You are having severe angina after a heart attack or open heart surgery.
- Heart failure severely limits your activity.
- You have certain abnormal heart rhythms at rest.
- You have very high blood pressure that will not go down.
- You have problems with your heart that happen with exercise.

The cardiac rehab team works with you to make a plan based on your personal health and goals. *Everyone is unique*, so each program is customized and your program may change as you progress. Members of a typical cardiac rehab team may include such health professionals as:

- Doctors.
- Nurses.
- Dietitians.
- Psychologists.
- Exercise specialists.
- Physical and occupational therapists.

A typical cardiac rehab program is divided into phases. You advance from one phase to the next. Most cardiac rehab sessions last for 60 minutes, 3 times a week.

Phase One starts while you are still in the hospital. You may start by walking in your room,and then in the hall.

You may start some simple exercises with a therapist. Health care team members will give you information and ask you many questions. You may not be able to remember details, so having a family member or an advocate with you to help keep track of information. The phase two usually starts in 2 to 4 weeks.

Phase Two begins when you go home or to another facility. This phase may last 8 to 12 weeks. You will travel to a cardiac rehab center or a place where it is offered. Typically, you increase your activity while being closely watched by a nurse or therapist. Exercises may be a combination of strength or resistance training and "cardio" or aerobic movement on a treadmill or other machines. Your condition will determine how often and how long these sessions will last.

In phase two, you may learn how to cook healthy meals, control your blood sugar, and change old habits. You may be taking a lot of **medicines**. You may need help with scheduling or planning how and when to take your medicines. Using a timer, divided pill box, or following a form may make it easier. Use the method that works best for you. Some medicines should not be taken with certain foods. You should not take all your medicines at the same time. Your blood pressure may get too low. Ask questions about your medicines until you are sure you understand.

Phase Three continues for the rest of your life. There will be less supervision. You may not need to see your doctors as often. You may still participate in cardiac rehab activities or become part of a group in your community. You may benefit from talking to other people about your experience if they are facing similar challenges.

Whether or not you decide to participate in cardiac rehab, how soon you may drive, have sex, or return to work will depend on your condition and decisions made by you with the advice of your doctors. If you need help, ask for it. Find out where you can get the help you need. Ask questions until you get answers and understand.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have severe chest discomfort, especially if the pain is crushing or pressure-like and spreads to the arms, back, neck, or jaw. **THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.** Do not wait to see if the pain will go away. **Get medical help at once.** Call your local emergency service (911 in the U.S.). **DO NOT** drive yourself to the hospital.
- You are sweating, feel sick to your stomach(*nausea*).
- You have shortness of breath.
- You feel dizzy or faint.
- You experience profound fatigue.
- You have weakness or numbness in your face, arms, or legs, especially on one side of the body.

Document Released: 09/26/2009 Document Re-Released: 10/20/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.