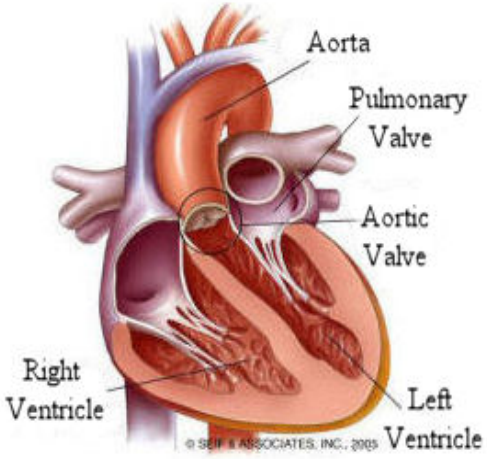
Aortic Valve Replacement
Care After Surgery

Read the instructions outlined below and refer to this sheet in the next few weeks. These discharge instructions provide you with general information on caring for yourself after you leave the hospital. Your surgeon may also give you specific instructions. While your treatment has been planned according to the most current medical practices available, unavoidable complications occasionally occur. If you have any problems or questions after discharge, please call your surgeon.



FOLLOWING SURGERY

- Full recovery from heart valve surgery can take several months.
- Blood thinning (*anticoagulation*) treatment with Coumadin is often prescribed for 6 weeks to 3 months after surgery for those with biological valves. It is prescribed for life for those with mechanical valves.
- Recovery includes healing of the surgical incision. There is a gradual building of stamina and exercise abilities. An exercise program under the direction of a physical therapist may be recommended.
- Once you have an artificial valve, your heart function and your life will return to normal. You usually feel better after surgery. Shortness of breath and fatigue should lessen. If your heart was already severely damaged before your surgery, you may continue to have problems.
- You can usually take up again most of your normal activities. You will have to continue to monitor your condition. You need to watch out for blood clots and infections.
- Artificial valves need to be replaced after a period of time. It is important that you see your caregiver regularly.
- You will require protective (*prophylactic*) antibiotics as a preventive measure against infection whenever you have dental work done. Always tell your medical caregiver or dentist that you have had valve surgery before any mouth surgery.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Use all medications as prescribed.
- Take your temperature every morning for the first week after surgery. Record these.
- Weigh yourself every morning for at least the first week after surgery and record.
- Do not lift more than ten pounds until your breastbone (*sternum*) has healed. Avoid all activities which would place strain on your incision.
- You may shower as directed by your caregiver. Pat incisions dry. Do not rub incisions with washcloth or towel.
- Avoid driving for 4 to 6 weeks following surgery or as instructed.
- Use your elastic stockings during the day. You should wear the stockings for at least 2 weeks after discharge or longer if your ankles are swollen. The stockings help blood flow and help reduce swelling in the legs. It is easiest to put the stockings on before you get out of bed in the morning. They should fit snugly.

PAIN CONTROL

- If a prescription was given for a pain reliever, please follow your doctor's directions.
- If the pain is not relieved by your medicine, becomes worse, or you have difficulty breathing, call your surgeon.

ACTIVITY

- Take frequent rest periods throughout the day.
- Wait one week before returning to strenuous activities such as heavy lifting (more than 10 pounds), pushing or pulling.
- Talk with your doctor about when you may return to work and your exercise routine.
- Do not drive while taking prescription pain medication.

NUTRITION

- You may resume your normal diet.
- Drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses a day).
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Call your caregiver for persistent nausea or vomiting.

ELIMINATION

- Your normal bowel function should return. If constipation should occur, you may:
- Take a mild laxative.
- Add fruit and bran to your diet.
- Drink more fluids.
- Call your doctor if constipation is not relieved.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You develop chest pain which is not coming from your *incision* (surgical cut).
- You develop shortness of breath or have difficulty breathing.
- You develop a temperature over 101º F (38.3º C).
- You have a sudden weight gain. Let your caregiver know what the weight gain is.
- You develop a rash.
- You develop any reaction or side effects to medications given.
- You have increased bleeding from wounds.
- You see redness, swelling, or have increasing pain in wounds.
- You have pus coming from your wound.
- You develop lightheadedness or feel faint.

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