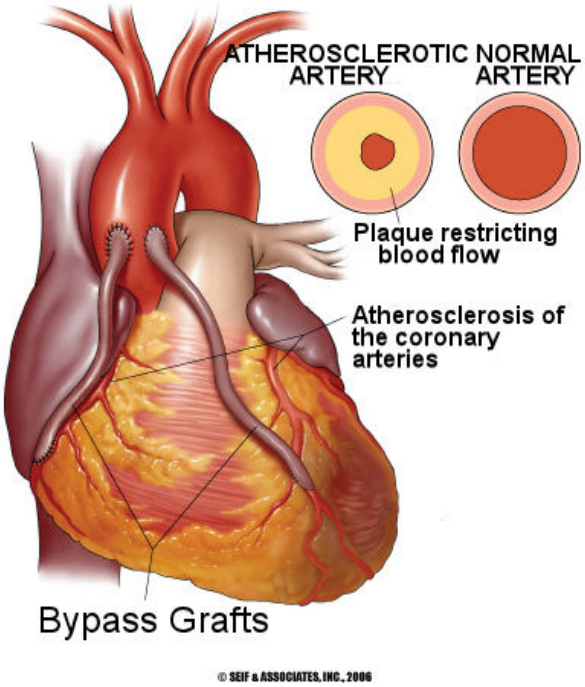
CABG (Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting)
Care After Surgery

Recovery from any surgery will be different for everyone. Some people feel quite well after 3 or 4 weeks, while others take longer depending on their condition before surgery. These instructions are general guidelines on caring for yourself after you leave the hospital. **Always follow your doctor's specific instructions.**

IT MAY BE NORMAL TO:



- Not have much appetite, feel nauseated by the smell of some foods or only want to eat one or two things.
- Have swelling in your legs, especially if you have an incision. Keeping your legs up will help. Wear elastic or compression stockings if you have them.
- Have trouble sleeping at night. Sometimes taking a pain pill before bedtime helps.You may not need as much sleep at night if you are napping during the day.
- Be constipated because of changes in your diet, activity and medicines. Ask about stool softeners. Try to include more fiber, fruits and vegetables in your diet.
- Feel sad or unhappy. You may be frustrated or cranky. You may have good days and bad days. Do not give up. Getting better takes time.
- Have a lump at the top of your chest incision.
- Experience muscle pain or tightness in your shoulders or upper back. Time and pain medicine may help this discomfort.
- Have numbness to the side of your incision if an artery in your chest was used for bypass.
- Need physical therapy if you have weakness or tingling in one or both of your arms.
- Be confused or unable to think clearly if your CABG was done with a heart-lung machine. This usually gets better in six weeks or so.

MEDICINES:

- You should have a list of all the medicines you will be taking before you leave the hospital. Ask a nurse or pharmacist to help you.
- For every medicine, the list should include:
  - Name.
  - Exact dose.
  - Time of day to be taken.
  - Any other details.
- Be sure you understand this list. Keep a copy with you at all times.
- Do not add or stop taking any medicine until you check with your doctor.

Medicines may have **side effects**. Side effects are not the same as allergies. Call the doctor who prescribed the medicine if you:

- Start throwing up, have diarrhea or stomach pain.
- Feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.
- Are confused, have trouble walking or keep dropping things.
- Feel that your heart is skipping beats, or beating too fast or too slow.
- Develop a rash.
- Notice unusual bruising or bleeding.

CARE OF YOUR CHEST INCISION:

- Tell your surgeon right away if you notice clicking in your chest (*sternum*).
- Support your chest with a pillow or your arms when you cough and take deep breaths.
- Follow instructions about when you may bathe or shower.
- The tapes may fall off on their own. If they do not, you may gently peel them off after 7 days.
- Tell your surgeon if you notice:
  - Increased tenderness of your incision.
  - More redness or swelling.
  - Drainage or pus.
- Only use lotions, creams or oils if approved by your surgeon.
- Protect your incision from sunlight during the first year to keep the scar from getting darker.

CARE OF YOUR LEG INCISION(S):

- Follow instructions about bathing and bandage changes.
- If you have staples, they have to be removed by the home health nurse or at the clinic.
- Avoid crossing your legs.
- Change positions every half hour.
- Elevate your leg(s) when you are sitting. You may put your legs on the arm of a sofa if you are lying down.
- Check your leg(s) daily for swelling. Check the incisions for redness or drainage.
- If you have them, wear your elastic stockings while you are up for at least 2 weeks. Take them off at bedtime. They will help reduce swelling.

DIET:

- Start making changes when your appetite is back to normal.
- Most doctors advise a low fat, low salt diet to lower the risk of more heart problems. You may be given specific goals for how much sodium and fat you should consume every day.
- A dietician may help you learn how to plan meals and make better choices about what you eat and drink.

WEIGHT:

- Weighing yourself every day is important so you know if you are retaining fluid that may make your heart or lungs have to work harder. Use the same scale each time.
  - Weigh your self every morning at the same time after you go to the bathroom, but before breakfast.
  - Your weight will be more accurate if you do not wear any clothes.
  - Record your weight.
  - Tell your doctor if you have gained 2 pounds or more overnight.

ACTIVITY:

Stop any activity at once if you feel short of breath, notice irregular heart beats, have chest pain or feel faint or dizzy. Tell your doctor or get help right away if the problem does not go away when you stop.

Showers. You may be able to take showers after your staples and pacing wires are out. Avoid soaking in a tub or near water jets until your incisions are healed.

Rest. You need a balance of rest and activity. You can rest by sitting quietly or by napping if you feel tired.

Walking. You will have started by in the hospital. Walk at your own pace and increase gradually. Wear sturdy shoes, not slippers. Dress for the weather if you walk outdoors. Rehab programs usually begin 4 weeks after surgery, but with the guidance of your doctors, you may begin to exercise sooner.

Climbing stairs. Unless your doctor tells you not to, go up stairs slowly and rest if you tire. Do not pull yourself up by the handrail. Use your thigh muscles to lift your legs.

Driving a car. You may ride as a passenger at any time. To allow your chest to heal properly, avoid driving, motorcycle or outdoor bicycle riding for the first 8 weeks. When traveling, get out of the car and walk around for a few minutes every 2 hours.

Lifting. Avoid lifting, pushing or pulling anything heavier than 10 pounds for 6 weeks after surgery. This includes carrying children, groceries, suitcases, mowing the grass and similar activities. Do not hold your breath during any activity, especially when lifting or using the rest room.

Returning to work. Check with your surgeon. People heal at different rates, but most people will be able to go back to work 6 to 12 weeks after surgery if their job is not strenuous.

Sexual. You may resume sexual relations when you feel comfortable. This is 2 to 4 weeks after discharge for most people. Ask your doctor or nurse for detailed information.

EXERCISE GUIDELINES

Exercise guidelines are usually determined by a stress test done about 4 weeks after surgery. Heart rate limits are generally set at 70 percent of those reached on this first stress test.

- Stop any exercise if you:
  - Have trouble breathing.
  - Chest pain (*angina*).
  - Get leg cramps.
  - Unusual fatigue.
- Modify your next exercise session if your pulse after exercise is more than 30 beats faster than your resting rate.

CALL YOUR SURGEON

- If any of your incisions are red, oozing, bleeding or the edges are separated.
- There is a "clicking" in your sternum when you move.
- A fever of 100º F (38º C) twice in
- 24 hours.
- You have more ankle swelling, leg pain, or pain in your calf.
- For any questions about your surgery.

CALL YOUR CARDIOLOGIST

- If your heart beats are irregular and fast.
- You are more short of breath.
- You have any questions about your medicines.
- Weight gain of more than 2 pounds a day.
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded when you first stand up.
- With questions about home health care or agencies in your community for help or transportation.
- Painful, frequent or bloody urination.

GET IMMEDIATE MEDICAL HELP IF YOU HAVE:

- Angina or chest pain that goes to your jaw or arms.
- Sudden shortness of breath, that does not go away with rest.
- Fast or irregular heart beats and trouble breathing.
- Numbness or weakness in your arms or legs.
- Coughing up bright red blood.
- Sudden severe headache.

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