Activities of Daily Living After Heart Surgery

Guidelines for maintaining sternal precautions

To help you recover from heart surgery, we encourage you to resume your regular daily activities while keeping these precautions in mind.

Be sure to get a good night’s sleep, get dressed every day, eat healthy meals, and slowly resume the hobbies or social activities you enjoy.

General Precautions to Protect Your Sternum

For 6 weeks or until cleared by your health care team:

- Do not lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 10 pounds.
- Do not raise your elbows higher than your shoulders. The only exception is if both arms are raised together in front of your body.
- Do not reach behind your back or bend and reach sideways.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Here are tips for performing ADLs while maintaining sternal precautions.

**Getting out of bed:**

2. Move your feet off the bed. Gently use your elbow to raise your body to a sitting position.
3. Sit on the side of the bed before standing up.

**Getting back into bed:**

1. Hugging a pillow, sit deep near the top ⅛ of the bed.
2. Lie on your side.
3. Lift your legs onto the bed with your knees bent.
4. Roll onto your back.
5. Scoot up or down using your legs (not arms).
Questions?

Call 206-598-4830

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

Occupational Therapy: 206-598-4830

5-Northeast Telemetry: 206-598-4500

Standing up from a bed, chair, and toilet:

- Avoid using your arms.
- Hug a pillow and lean forward with your nose out over your toes.
- Use elevation if needed, such as a raised toilet seat, pillow, or foam cushion.

Getting dressed and personal hygiene:

- Follow the general sternal precautions, listed on page 1, when putting on a shirt, T-shirt, or bra, and when shampooing or combing your hair.
- Do not reach behind your back for toilet hygiene or to put on a coat, robe, or shirt.

Specific Activities

For 6 weeks after surgery, or until cleared by your health care team:

- Have someone else do chores, such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, raking, digging, or mowing the lawn.
- Do not drive. It is OK to ride in the front seat of a car with a seat belt. On long drives, stop every hour and walk for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Avoid lifting. Ask for help with lifting more than 10 pounds of groceries, laundry, children, pets, or other items.
- Do not open tight jar lids, stuck windows, or heavy doors.
- Avoid soaking in bath and hot tubs and using saunas.

For 3 months after surgery, or until cleared by your health care team:

- Don’t play golf, tennis, or softball.
- No bowling, skiing, running, or horseback riding.
- Avoid vigorous swimming.

Be Patient with Yourself

It is normal to feel easily frustrated, stressed, tired, or depressed after heart surgery. Some people feel as though they are not as sharp mentally. Don’t force yourself to perform mentally challenging tasks. Talk with your health care provider if these feelings or problems persist.