

# Activities of Daily Living After Heart Surgery

## How to “Move in the Tube”

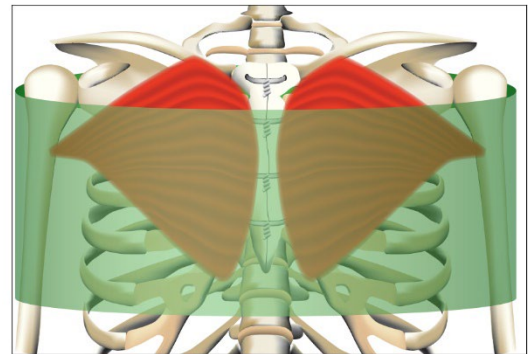


This handout gives important guidelines to help your healing and keep you safe after heart surgery. It includes recommendations for safety when completing activities of daily living (ADL) such as putting on clothes and taking a shower.

### Activity Recommendations

“Keep Your Move in the Tube” is a phrase to help you use your arms and minimize the stress on your *sternum* (breastbone) while it heals after surgery.

The goal is to **keep your upper arms close to your body** when lifting or supporting weight. You can move your arms outside of the tube when they aren’t holding weight. This handout explains how to safely do common activities such as getting out of bed, standing up from a chair, and reaching overhead are below. Your therapists can help you adjust activities so they fit your needs, and they’ll show you how to do others that aren’t in this handout.



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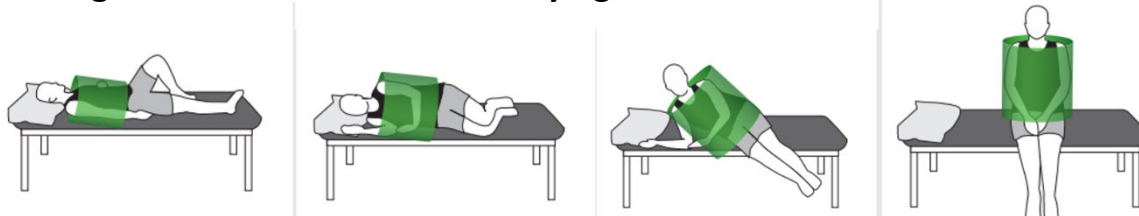
**The “tube” is the area around your upper arms, sternum, and the attached muscles.**

When performing tasks that require lifting, pushing, and pulling, use both arms together and keep them “in the tube”.

There is not a specific weightlifting limit, but start slowly. Pay attention to how your body feels. If it hurts, stop or change what you’re doing. Sharp pain is not expected, but some muscle soreness is normal.

### Daily Activities “In the Tube”

#### Getting In and Out of Bed While Staying “In the Tube”



**Notice that the upper arms stay close to the body in all movements, and both arms are being used.**

1. Bend your knees and roll onto your side.
2. Move your feet off the bed. Pull your feet against the edge of the bed.
3. Use **both** of your arms to push up into sitting. Keep your upper arms close to your body.
4. Sit for a few minutes before you stand up.



Scan for a digital copy of this handout.

## Standing up from a bed, chair, or toilet

1. Scoot to the edge of the surface you are sitting on.
2. Keep **both of your arms at your sides** and them to help support yourself when standing up. Keep your upper arms close to your body when pushing.
3. When sitting down, avoid reaching behind to lower yourself into a chair.



***“In the Tube”***



***“Out of the Tube”***

## Using the Toilet

- When reaching behind your back for hygiene and/or pulling up pants, reach back with **one arm at a time**. Keep your upper arm close to your body for comfort.
- A *bidet* (a water sprayer) is another option for cleaning yourself more thoroughly.
- Your OT (occupational therapist) may recommend the use of a toilet aid and will show you how to use it.

## Bathing

- You can move your arms freely to reach your upper and lower body when showering. When showering and drying off, reach behind your back **one arm at a time** for comfort.
- Do **not** take a bath or soak until your provider says it is OK. This includes swimming or sitting in a hot tub or sauna.
- Using a shower chair can help save your energy and prevent falls.
- Wash your incision gently with mild, unscented soap every day. Do **not** scrub your wound.
- Do **not** put creams, ointments, lotions, or powders on your incision.
- Your OT may recommend a handheld shower hose, non-slip bathmat, or a long-handled sponge or brush.

## Dressing

- You can wear any style of shirt that feels comfortable. When you put on a t-shirt, button-down shirt, or jacket, keep your upper arm close to your body when reaching behind your back for comfort.
- Sit down when getting dressed to save energy and reduce your risk of falling.
- Your OT may recommend long-handled tools such as reachers, sock aids, or long shoehorns. Elastic laces may also make dressing easier.

## Surgical Bras and Chest Supports

- Your team may recommend you wear a surgical bra or chest support after your surgery. These can help your wound heal by preventing the downward or sideways pull of your chest on the incision.
- Underwire bras are **not** recommended. They can put pressure on your wound.

## Other Activities

Follow these guidelines when you do daily tasks such as grocery shopping, cleaning, chores, yard work, childcare, and hobbies.

- **When reaching overhead to get items from a shelf:**  
Use both arms and keep your arms close to your body.

**“In the Tube”**



**“Out of the Tube”**



- **When holding, carrying, or moving items:**  
Use both hands to hold the item and keep your arms close to your body.



- **When reaching to push or pull an object:**  
Use both hands and keep your arm close to your body.



## Driving

Do **not** drive any vehicles or operate power tools until your provider gives you permission. On long drives, stop every hour to get out and take a brief walk.

## Sexual Activity

You can have sex when you feel ready. Take your time so you don't overdo it, and follow the 'move in the tube' tips for your body position.

## Energy Conservation

- **Get plenty of rest between tiring activities.** For example, take a shower in the morning and schedule appointments in the afternoon.
- **Think of your energy like a charge on your cell phone.** You have only so much to use before you need to charge it. Pace yourself!
- **You may have good days and challenging days.** Give yourself permission to ask for help.
- **After major surgery it is normal to feel tired, frustrated, or even depressed.** Some people cannot think as clearly as usual. Talk with your care provider if these issues do not go away. We are here to help you!

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

**Occupational Therapy:**  
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