

# Exercise After Robot-Assisted Heart Surgery

*To help you live a healthy, active life*



*Getting regular exercise is an important part of your recovery. This handout will help you increase your activities safely after surgery.*

## Activity Recommendations

- **Move your arms.** Part of your healing process will be participating in activities like you did before surgery.
- **Listen to your body.** Pain is a signal to stop or change the activity. We do expect soreness. But we do **not** expect a sudden, sharp increase in pain.
- There are **no** range of motion restrictions. There are **no** weight bearing restrictions. Your activities will be specific to you.

## Your Exercise Program

### While You Are in the Hospital

Your physical therapist will prescribe a walking program for you to start while you are in the hospital. It is important that you walk with staff 3 to 4 times every day.

Activity will help your digestive, respiratory (breathing), and circulatory (blood vessel) systems recover from your procedure. This will help you:

- Stabilize your blood pressure and reduce dizziness
- Stop using extra oxygen
- Improve your strength, balance, and energy
- Improve your mood and help you sleep better at night
- Reduce constipation and nausea

### When You Go Home

Keep doing the exercise and walking program that your therapists taught you. Your goal is to be walking **at least** 30 minutes every day by 6 weeks after your procedure. The right exercises will help you:

- Recover from your surgery
- Decrease your back, shoulder, and chest muscle pain
- Increase your endurance and your body's efficiency
- Maintain mobility and muscle tone
- Control your blood pressure
- Lose weight
- Sleep better

To get the best results from your walking program:

- **Warm up before you walk and cool down afterward.** Stretch or do gentle exercises for at least 5 minutes before and after you walk. This will allow your heart and breathing rates to increase slowly before you walk and decrease slowly afterward. This helps your heart and muscles get the right amount of oxygen during activity.
- **Take many short walks** every day, throughout the day.
- **Slowly increase the amount of time you spend walking each day.** To do this:
  - When you first get home after your procedure, walk at least 3 times a day for 5 minutes each time. If you were walking more while you were in the hospital, continue with the time that you were walking while you were in the hospital.
  - Each week, increase the total time you exercise by about 3 minutes. Do this by adding 1 minute to each of your daily 3 walks until you are walking for **at least 30 minutes** every day. Here is a sample walking program:

### Sample Walking Program

| Week # | Warm-Up | Walk       | Cool-Down | Total Walking Time |
|--------|---------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1      | 5 min   | 3 x 5 min  | 5 min     | 25 min             |
| 2      |         | 3 x 6 min  |           | 28 min             |
| 3      |         | 3 x 7 min  |           | 31 min             |
| 4      |         | 3 x 8 min  |           | 34 min             |
| 5      |         | 3 x 9 min  |           | 37 min             |
| 6      |         | 3 x 10 min |           | 40 min             |

If you cannot walk for exercise, talk with your physical therapist about the type of exercise that will work best for you. Follow the sample program above, but do your type of exercise instead of walking.

### Monitor Your Body

For 6 weeks after your procedure, be active at a low to moderate level. Pace yourself. Slow down or rest if you are breathless, dizzy, cannot talk, or are perspiring. Monitor how hard your body is working in these ways:

- **Use your rate of perceived exertion (RPE) on a scale of 0 to 10.** When you are active, think about how hard you are working, or how much effort it takes for you to keep doing the activity you are doing. Rate your effort on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being lowest exertion and 10 being highest exertion. If you are working **between levels 2 and 4 on a scale of 0 to 10**, you are exercising at a low to moderate level (see table below, “Effort Level”). This is the goal training zone.
- **Talk to someone while you exercise.** Use your rate of breathing to guide how hard you are exercising. When exercising or walking, you should not be so out of breath that you cannot talk with someone.



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## Effort Level (RPE)

| RPE | Work Load        | Talk Test                                                 |
|-----|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 0   | Very, very light | At rest                                                   |
| 1   | Very light       | Gentle walking or strolling                               |
| 2   | Fairly light     | Steady pace, not breathless                               |
| 3   |                  |                                                           |
| 4   | Somewhat hard    | Brisk walking, can hold a conversation                    |
| 5   | Hard             | Very brisk walking, must take a breath every 4 to 5 words |
| 6   |                  |                                                           |
| 7   | Very hard        | Cannot talk and keep pace                                 |
| 8   |                  |                                                           |
| 9   | Very, very hard  |                                                           |
| 10  |                  |                                                           |

*Table adapted from Avers, Dale, and Brown, Marybeth. (2009). White Paper: Strength Training for the Older Adult. Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy, 32(4), 148-152.*

For **2 weeks after surgery**, until your follow-up appointment with your cardiologist, do **not**:

- Vacuum, garden, rake, or mow the lawn.
- Play high-intensity sports such as tennis, baseball, swimming, or bowling.
- Drive a car or truck. Your reaction time is slower and you are at higher risk for injuring your chest area.
- Do any other activity that could hurt your chest area.

## Pay attention to Your Body

Slow down if:

- Your body is working at more than a moderate level of effort (more than 5 on scale of 0 to 10)
- You have an increase in heart rate (pulse) of more than 20 to 30 beats above your resting heart rate
- For more than 10 minutes after you STOP exercising:
  - You are short of breath
  - Your pulse is 20 beats per minute higher than when you started exercising
- You have extreme tiredness or increased swelling in your legs or feet up to 24 hours after you exercise
- You have pain or cramping in your leg muscles
- You have pain in your joints, heels, or shins

Stop exercising and talk with your doctor before starting again if you:

- Have an abnormal heart rhythm – an irregular pulse, *palpitations* (a rapid, fluttering or pounding heart), sudden very slow pulse, or a sudden burst of fast heartbeats
- Have new or ongoing pain or pressure in your chest, back, arms, or throat
- Feel dizzy, lightheaded, or faint
- Loose coordination, have changes in your vision, or become confused
- Have cold sweats or become pale
- Have nausea or vomiting

**If you need medical care right away, call 9-1-1.**

## Phase 2 Cardiac Rehab

Most people who have heart procedures start **Phase 2 Cardiac Rehab** about 2 to 6 weeks after discharge. The staff at the cardiac rehab facility you have chosen will help you safely increase the intensity and duration of your exercises. Your goal is to be able to do your exercise program on your own. Keep doing your walking program on the days that you do not go to cardiac rehab.

## Choose a Heart Healthy Lifestyle

The American Heart Association recommends that people with heart disease choose a lifestyle that supports heart health. This includes:

- **Take your medications.** Always take your medicine on time, and exactly as your doctor prescribed.
- **Quit smoking.** This can improve the health of your heart and blood vessels and help your disease symptoms improve.
- **Be active and maintain a healthy weight.** This lowers your risk of diabetes, and helps your blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides. A healthy weight reduces the burden on your heart and can keep heart disease from getting worse.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Eat a diet that is high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, low-fat dairy products, and fish (instead of other meats). Avoid foods that are high in sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats (saturated or trans fats).
- **Reduce stress in your life.** Plan ahead, slow down, and make time to connect with friends and family. Try not to worry about things that you cannot change.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Your physical therapist will answer your questions about exercise during your therapy sessions in the hospital.

Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about your medical care.

## American Heart Association Resources

Visit the American Heart Association website at [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) for ideas and inspiration to help you stay active and healthy. From the menu bar, click on “*Healthy Living*” and then “*Fitness*.”