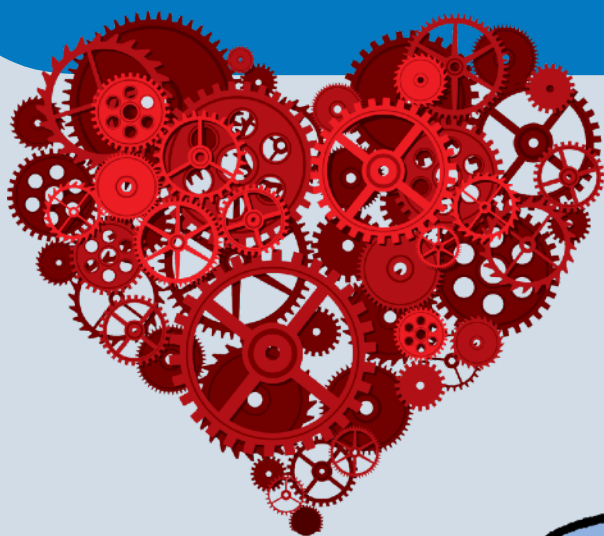




University Hospital
Southampton
NHS Foundation Trust

How to look after yourself after heart surgery



Easy Read



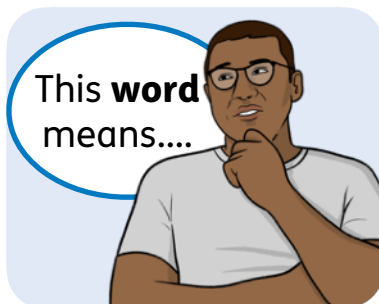
This is an Easy Read version of some information. It may not include all of the information but it will tell you about the important parts.



This Easy Read booklet uses easier words and pictures. Some people may still want help to read it.



Some words are in **bold** - this means the writing is thicker and darker. These are important words in the booklet.



Sometimes if a bold word is hard to understand, we will explain what it means.

What is in this leaflet

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About this leaflet



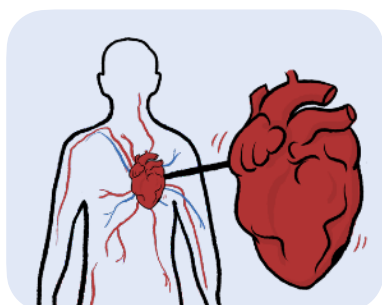
This leaflet is from Southampton NHS.



It is for people who are going home after having **heart surgery** at Southampton General Hospital.



Surgery is when a doctor cuts open your body to fix a health issue.



Heart surgery is surgery to fix health issues in your heart.

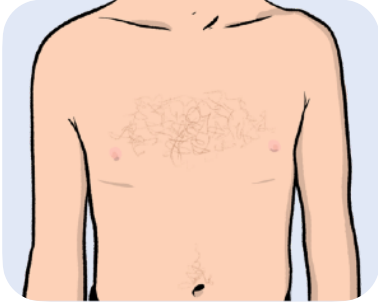


We know that you might be worried about going home after your heart surgery.

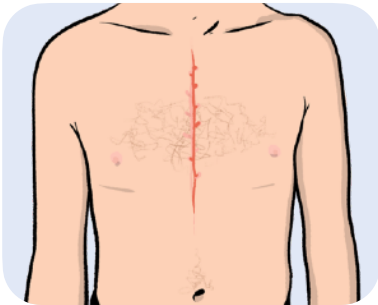


Please read this leaflet to find out how to look after yourself after heart surgery.

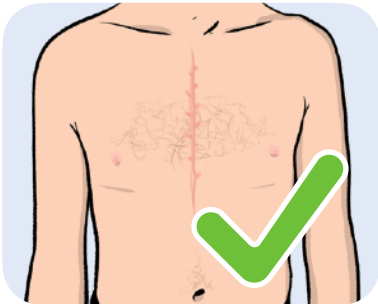
Why you need to look after yourself



During your heart surgery, the doctor will have cut into your chest to get to your heart.

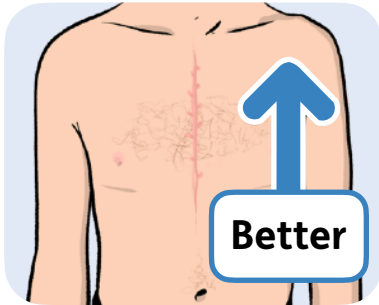


The cut that was made is now called a **wound**.



You must look after the wound.

It is important to look after the wound so that:



- The wound and your chest get better.



- You do not get another health issue.

Moving around



You can move if it is not painful for you.

Moving includes:



- Getting up and slowly starting to walk more.



- Turning over in bed.



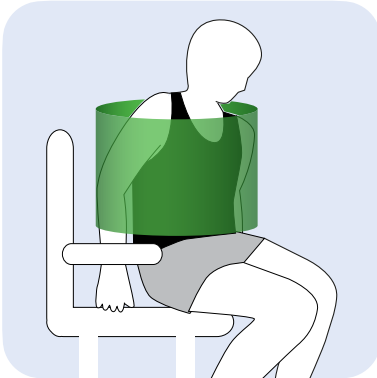
- Lifting things.



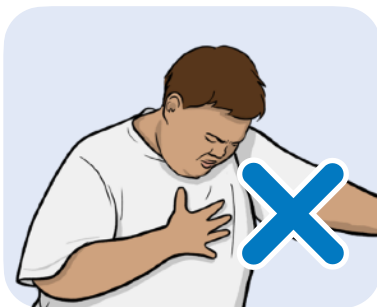
- Pushing and pulling things.



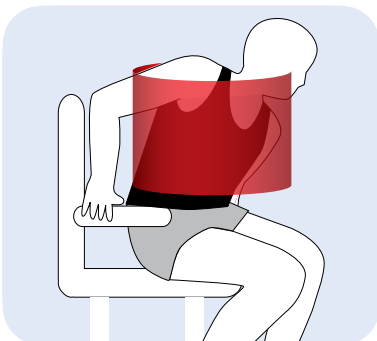
You should try moving in different ways slowly as you get better.



To help you think about pain when you move, pretend that you have a tube around your chest, like in this picture. The tube in this picture is green, to show that this is a good thing.



You should not have more pain when you move outside of the tube.

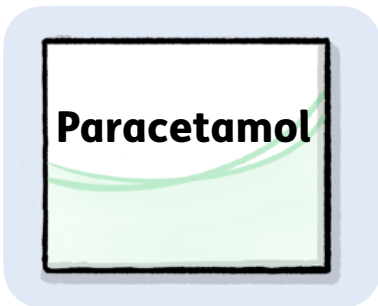


If your chest pain gets worse when you move outside the tube, like this picture, bring your arms back inside the tube.

Feeling pain



Some people might feel sore while they are getting better.



If you feel sore, keep taking your paracetamol.



If you hear your chest click, please tell someone from your **surgery team**, or your local doctor's surgery,



Your **surgery team** is the healthcare staff who have helped you with your heart surgery.

Your surgery team includes:



- The doctors who did your surgery.



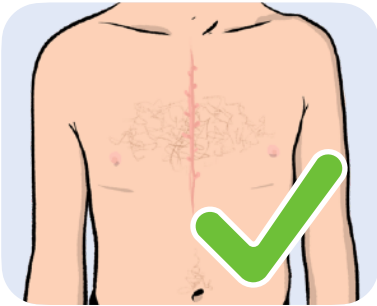
- The nurses who will help you get better after your surgery.



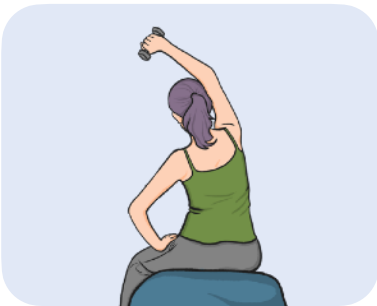
- The therapy and rehabilitation teams, who will help you get better after your surgery.

Getting help with moving

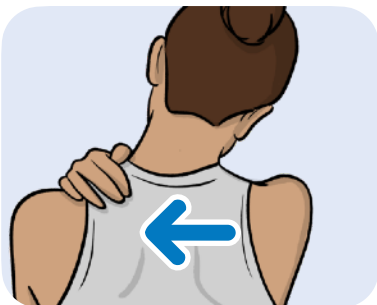
As you are getting better, your surgery team will:



- Help you to start moving in ways that use your chest.



- Show you exercises that will help you start to move more.

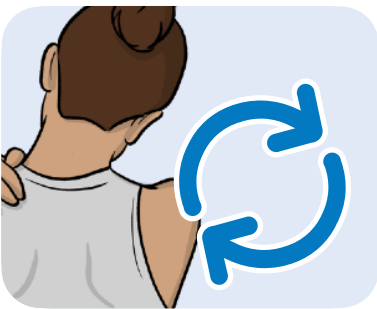


You can do some shoulder exercises yourself.

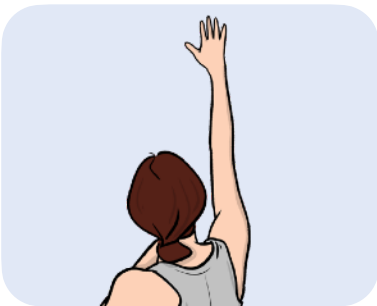
Doing these exercises will stop your shoulders from getting stiff:



- Shrug your shoulders, then put them back down.



- Roll your shoulders backwards in a circle.

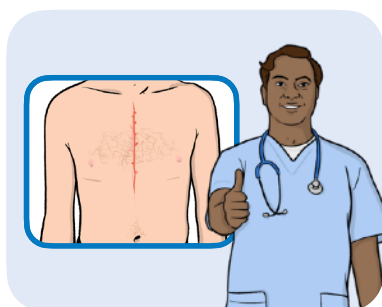


- Slowly lift 1 arm above your head and then put it down again. You can do this for both arms.

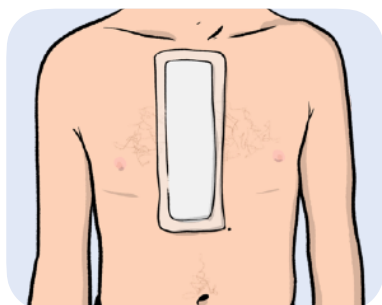


Repeat the exercises 3 times per day.

Looking after your wound



Your surgery team will check your wound before you leave hospital.

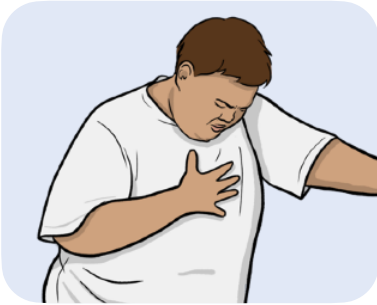


You may need to go home with a large plaster or dressing on your wound.

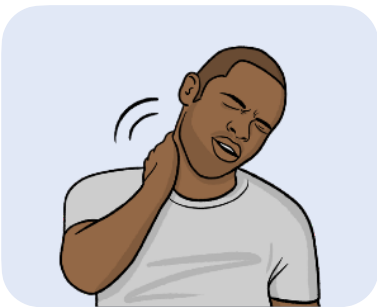


If you go home without a plaster or dressing on your wound, you need to check your wound every day.

It is normal if:



- Your wound hurts for the first few weeks after your heart surgery.



- Your shoulders, neck or chest hurt or feel stiff.

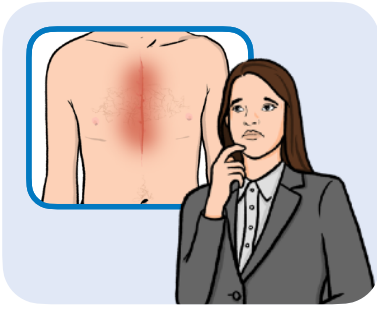


- Your wound feels itchy.

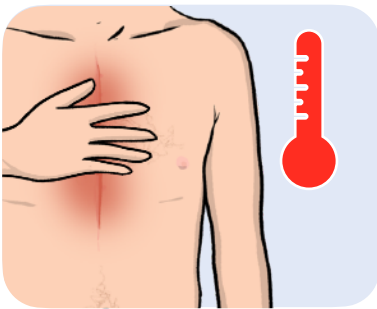


- You can not feel your wound at all.

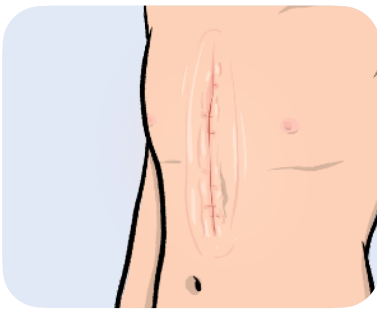
You should go to your local doctor's surgery if your wound:



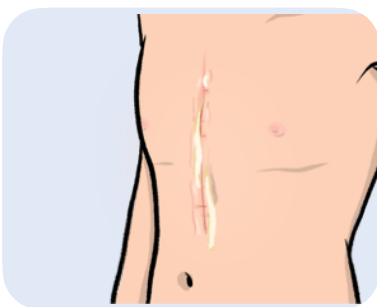
- Looks very red.



- Feels hot when you touch it.



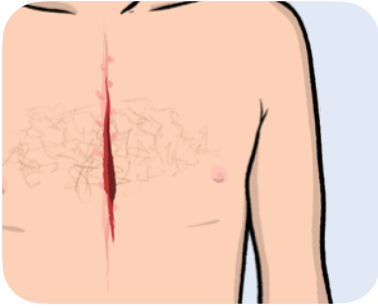
- Starts **swelling** - this means your wound starts to feel bigger and more like a bump.



- Has liquid coming out of it.

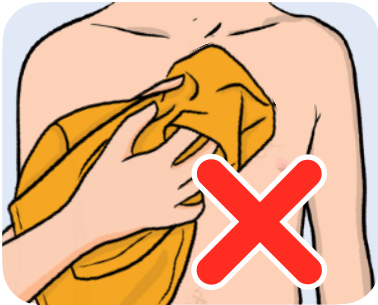


- Smells bad.



You should also go to your local doctor's surgery if your wound has opened up.

Try not to:



- Be rough when you dry your chest.



- Rub, scratch or pick your wound.

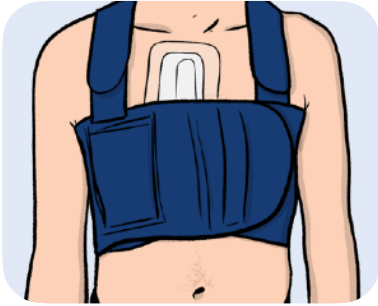


- Use soaps or creams that have perfume in them.

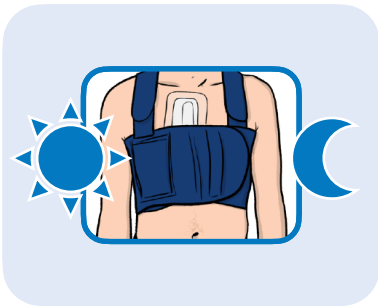


- Stay in the shower for a long time. You should not have a bath until your wound is completely better.

If you were given a support vest



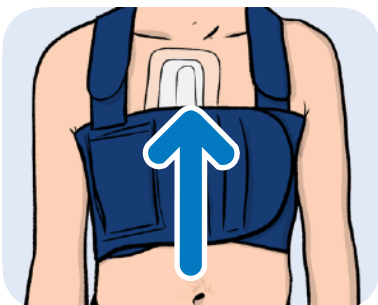
You may have been given a vest to wear to protect your chest.



You should wear the vest all day and all night for about 6 weeks, until you are better.

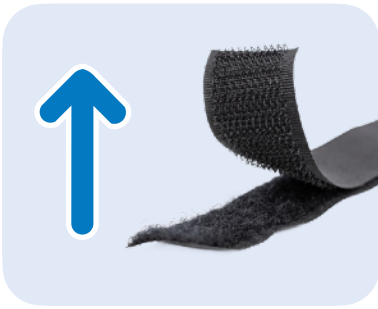


Ladies should also wear a bra without wires for support, as well as your vest.



As you move, your vest may rise up your chest and feel tighter.

If the vest rides up you should:



1. Undo the vest from the front.



2. Pull down the vest at the back.



3. Do the vest back up.

If you were given support stockings



Stockings are like tights. They cover people's feet and legs.



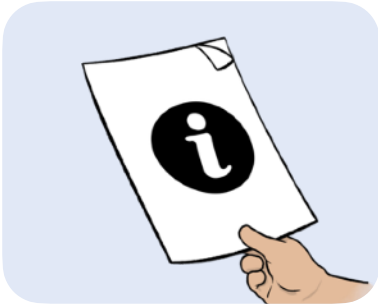
If you were wearing support stockings in hospital then please carry on wearing them for 2 weeks, until you can walk properly.



You should make sure you check the skin on your legs every day.



You might need help to put your support stockings on.



Your surgery team should have given you information about wearing support stockings at home.



If you have not been given any information, please tell your surgery team.

Looking after yourself

Feelings

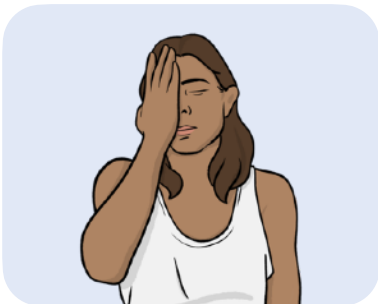
After your heart surgery, you may:



- Feel sad or worried.



- Have bad dreams.



- Not be able to concentrate on things.



Do not worry, this is normal.



You should start to feel better over time.



If you do not, talk to someone at your local doctor's surgery about how you are feeling.

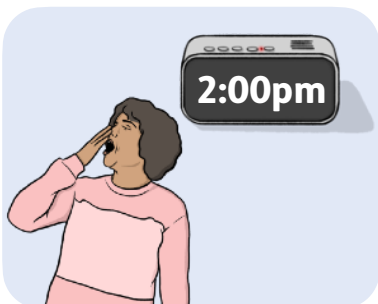
Sleeping



It may take some time for you to get back to your normal way of sleeping.



You can sleep in any way that you find comfortable.



At first, you may want to nap in the afternoon.



An afternoon nap is fine, but try not to nap for too long or you may struggle to fall asleep in the evening.

Smoking



You must not smoke, because it can be dangerous for your health. This includes electric cigarettes - these are also known as vapes.



If you are struggling with how to stop smoking, please talk to your surgery team.



You can also call the NHS stop smoking service on 0300 123 1044, or visit their website:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit

Eating



It may take some time for you to get back to your normal way of eating.

You may notice some changes, like:



- Not feeling hungry.



- Not being able to smell or taste food properly.



Do not worry, this is normal.



You should start to feel better over time.

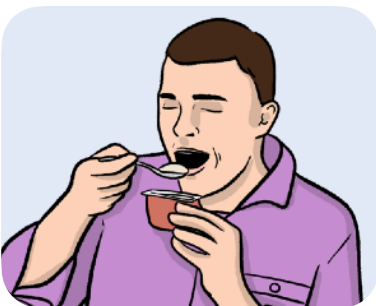
In the first few weeks after your heart surgery, you should:



- Try to eat healthily.



- Not go on a diet or try to lose weight.

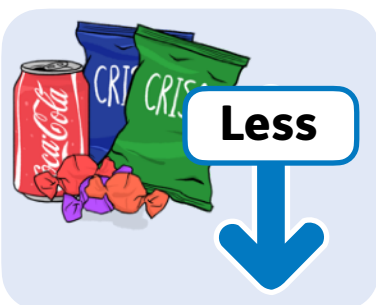


- Eat snacks throughout the day if you do not feel like eating a large meal.

To eat healthily, you should:

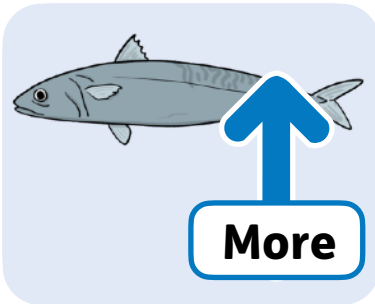


- Try to eat 5 different fruits and vegetables a day.



- Eat less foods with fat and salt in them.

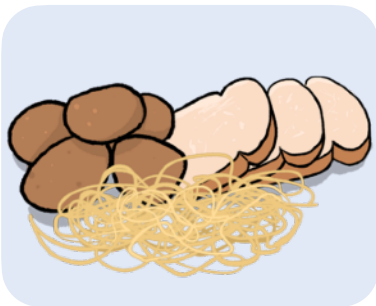
To eat healthily, you should also:



- Eat more fish and less meat.



- Try not to fry your food. Instead, you can grill or steam your food.

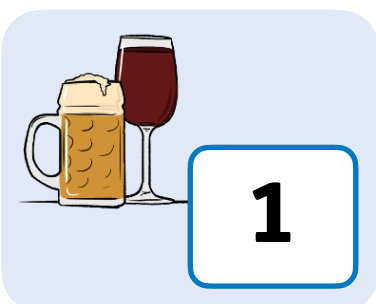


- Eat lots of foods which have fibre in them. This includes cereal, pasta, rice and wholegrain bread.

Drinking alcohol

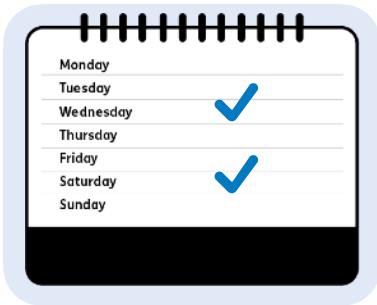


If you drink alcohol, try not to drink too much.



You should try not to drink more than 1 alcoholic drink a day.

You should also:

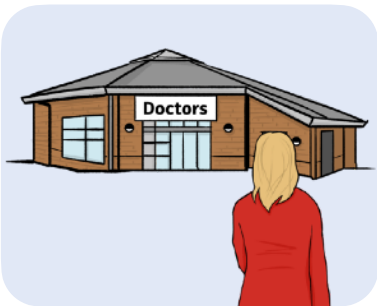


- Not drink alcohol on at least 2 days a week.

Going to your local doctor's surgery



When you leave hospital after your heart surgery, you will be given enough medicine for 14 days.



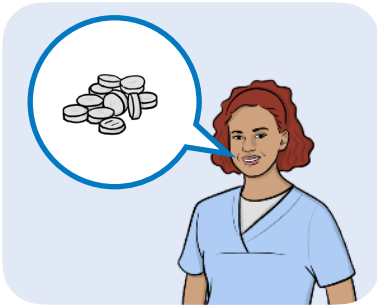
Please go to your local doctor's surgery for more medicine before you run out.



The hospital will tell your doctor that you have had your heart surgery.



Your surgery team may have told your local doctor's surgery that you need different medicines once you are home.



Before you leave hospital, someone will explain the different medicines to you.

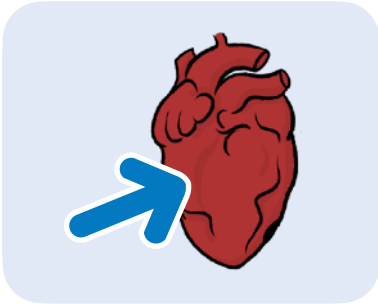


You will also be asked to go back to your local hospital for an appointment between 8 and 12 weeks after your heart surgery.



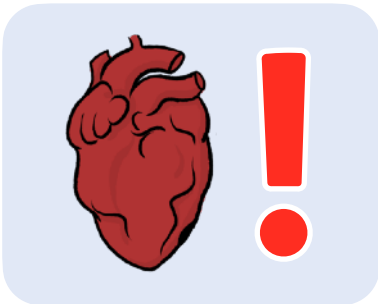
We will write to you about any appointments.

If you have a mechanical valve

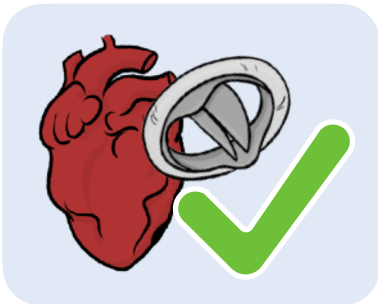


Mechanical means made by a machine.

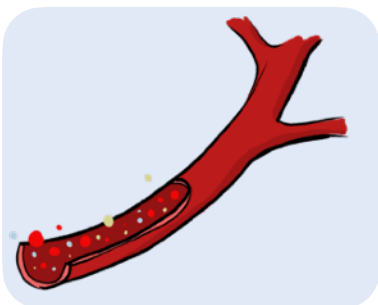
A **valve** is a part of your heart.



Sometimes a valve can stop working properly.



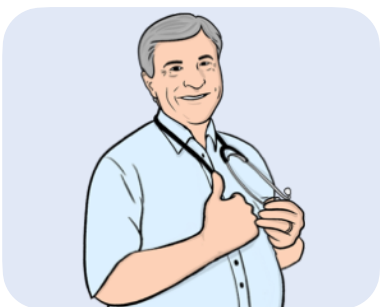
Doctors can replace the valve with a mechanical one so the heart can work properly again.



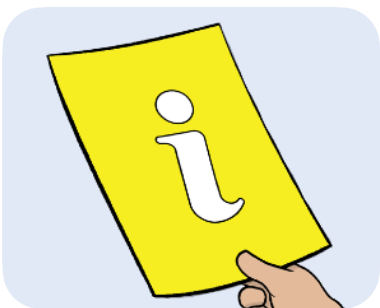
If you have a mechanical valve then your blood needs to stay the right thickness.



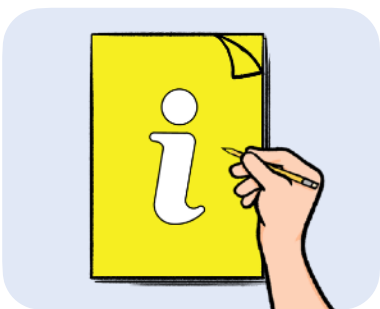
You will need to go to your local doctor's surgery for blood tests so they can check your blood thickness.



Your surgery team or local doctor's surgery will organise this for you.



When you leave hospital you will be given a yellow booklet.



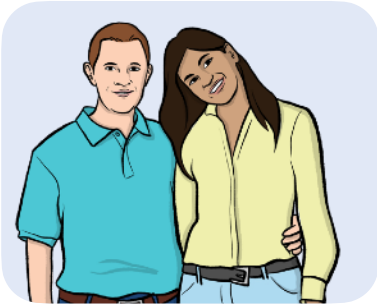
Information about your health and blood thickness will be written down in this booklet.



Make sure you take this yellow booklet with you every time you see a doctor.

Doing activities

Sexual activities



You can take part in sexual activities after your heart surgery.



You can try different sexual activities slowly as you get better.

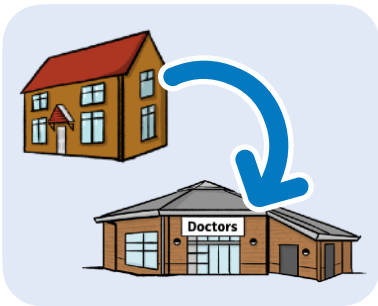


If anything makes you feel pain, you should stop.

Driving your car



If you have a car, you must not drive it for at least 6 weeks.



After 6 weeks, you should only drive short journeys until you are better.



You must still wear a seatbelt in a car, even though it goes across your chest.



You can put a cushion under the seatbelt if that makes you more comfortable.



Some **car insurance** companies will need you to tell them that you have had heart surgery.



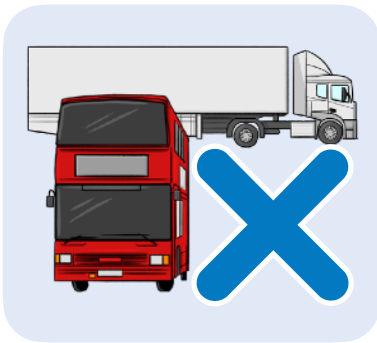
Car insurance is protection if something goes wrong with your car.

You pay money to a car insurance company and they pay if your car gets stolen or becomes broken.



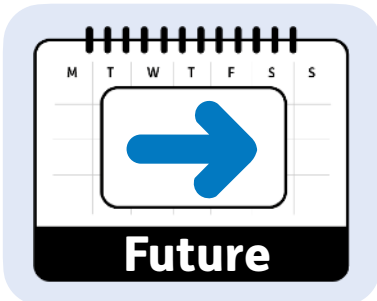
You should ask your car insurance company whether they need to know about your heart surgery.

Driving a lorry or bus



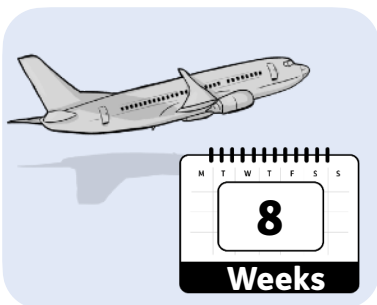
You will not be allowed to drive a lorry or a bus. Your lorry or bus **license** will be stopped.

A **license** is a document that shows you are allowed to drive a vehicle.



You may be able to get this license again in the future. You will need to talk to a doctor first.

Travelling



We suggest you do not travel to a different country for at least 8 weeks.



Please talk to your surgery team before you travel to a different country.

Going back to work



You should not go to work for at least 8 weeks.



If you have a job where you move your body a lot and lift things, you should not go to work for at least 12 weeks.



After 8 or 12 weeks, you should try and go back to work for only a few hours every day until you are better.



You can contact Citizen's Advice for help with getting **sick pay**.

Sick pay is when your workplace still pays you when you are off sick.

Citizen's Advice can also give advice with:



- **Fit notes** - these are letters from your local doctor's surgery or hospital that say you can not work.



- **Benefits** - this is money from the government to help you pay for the things you need to live.



You can contact Citizen's Advice by calling: 03444 111 444.

Going to the dentist



You must go to the dentist every 6 months.



If you had an operation on a heart valve you should check with your medical team if you need medicine called antibiotics before your dentist does any work on your teeth.



Make sure you talk to your dentist or a doctor about this.

Getting help

Rehabilitation courses



Rehabilitation means getting better after an illness or injury.



Some people will be offered rehabilitation courses after heart surgery.



Staff in the hospital will talk to you about rehabilitation courses.

We run a few different rehabilitation courses that can help you with:



- Exercise.



- Being healthy.



- Relaxing.

Support groups



You may find it helpful to join a heart surgery support group.



You will be able to make friends with other people who have had heart surgery.



A charity called the **British Heart Foundation** can help you find a support group in your local area. You can contact them by calling:

0300 330 3322.



A charity called Somerville Heart Foundation supports patients with Adult Congenital Heart Disease (ACHD). You can contact them by calling:

01473 252007.

Helpful phone numbers



You can call our heart surgery case manager team on 023 8120 8686.



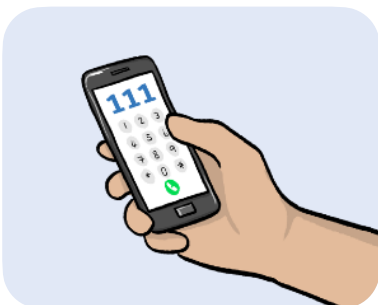
You can call our rehabilitation team on 023 8120 6673.



Please call this number if you have any questions about getting better after heart surgery.



If you are having a health emergency, call 999.

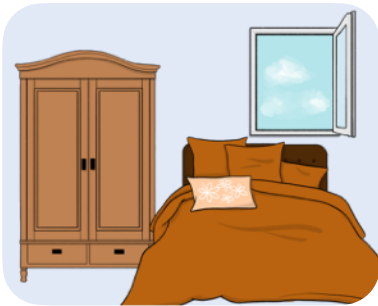


If it is not an emergency but you need health advice fast, call 111.

Wessex Heartbeat House



Wessex Heartbeat House is an organisation that supports families of patients who do not live in our area who are having surgery.



They can stay at Wessex Heartbeat House while their family member is in hospital.



You can contact Wessex Heartbeat House by calling: 023 8039 0548.

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as large print, Braille or audio, please:



- Telephone 0800 484 0135
- or email patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk



For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit: www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport