

# After You Leave the Hospital



## What Is My Follow Up Care After A Heart Attack?

After you leave the hospital, you will have a follow up appointment scheduled with a Heart Doctor or a Nurse Practitioner at a Michigan Medicine Clinic. It is very important you keep this appointment.

### What happens at my follow up appointment?

You can expect to spend at least 1-hour at your follow-up appointment. During your visit your health care provider will do the following:

- Perform a physical exam
- Review the blood pressure readings you recorded on your log sheet (on the following pages)
- Review and adjust your medications (if necessary)
- Explain your health status
- Listen to your concerns
- Provide education and counseling

### How can I keep track of my appointments?

A log can help you keep track of the dates and times you need to see your doctor or other health care providers. Use the log included in this booklet to help you keep track of your upcoming appointments.



## How will I monitor myself at home?

You play an active role in monitoring your health at home. It's important to track your condition carefully after you leave the hospital. Be sure to write down the results of your blood pressure self-checks on the log sheet so you can share the results with your health care team.

You will need to perform and record the following self-checks daily:

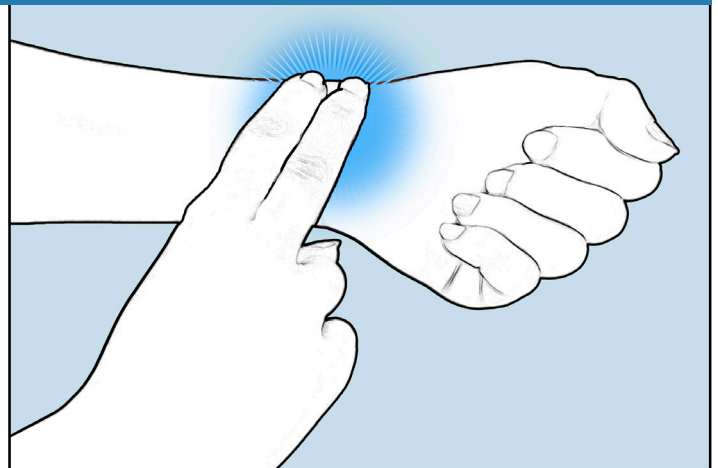
- Check your blood pressure in the morning 2 hours after you have taken your morning medication.
- Check your pulse (heart rate) in the morning 2 hours after you have taken your morning medications.

### Checking your pulse

You can measure your pulse on either your wrist or your neck. Follow these steps below to count your pulse:

1. Place your index and middle finger on the palm side of your wrist just below the base of your thumb, or, place your index and second fingers on your neck midway between your Adam's apple and your ear lobe, just below your jawbone on either side of your windpipe.
2. Press **lightly** with your fingers until you feel the blood pulsing beneath your fingers. You may need to move your fingers around slightly up or down until you feel the pulsing.
3. Use a watch with a second hand, or look at a clock with a second hand.
4. Count the beats you feel for 30 seconds. Multiply this number by 2 to get your pulse (heart beats per minute).

Count your pulse:  beats in 30 seconds x 2 =  beats/minute



# What Steps Should I Take When Checking My Blood Pressure (BP) at Home?

## Before

**2  
Hours**

2 hours before your BP is taken:



No Alcohol



No Eating

**30  
Min**

30 minutes before your BP is taken:



No Tobacco



No Caffeine



No Exercise

**5  
Min**

5 minutes before your BP is taken:



Have log sheet ready to record BP



Sit still and relax in a chair with a back and don't talk for 5 minutes

## During (When taking your BP)

- Use correct cuff size for your arm
- Put cuff on bare upper arm
- Sit in a chair with your back straight and feet flat on the floor
- Support arm at heart level on a flat surface
- Do not talk while taking your BP



## After (After checking your BP)

- Wait 1 minute and measure a 2nd time
- If your blood pressure is high you may repeat the reading a 3rd time and record the lowest of the two readings
- Record measurements in your BP log





## When Do I Need to Seek Medical Help and Who Do I Call?

### What symptoms are considered an emergency?

Call 911 immediately if you have any of the following signs and symptoms. They need to be treated right away.

### Signs and symptoms of heart attack:

- Pain, discomfort, squeezing, fullness, or pressure in your chest
- Pain in 1 or both arms, back, shoulders, neck, or jaw
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Feeling light-headed, dizzy, or breaking out in a cold sweat
- Stomach pain, bloating, or diarrhea
- Extreme fatigue
- Racing heart even when resting
- Fainting or passing out

Remember, some heart attacks are sudden while others occur more slowly. Even if symptoms go away and return, **you must call 911 now.**

### Signs and symptoms of stroke:

- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding others
- Sudden trouble seeing in 1 or both eyes
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, usually on 1 side of the body.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden or severe headache with no known cause

### **Signs and symptoms of changes at your procedure site:**

- Sudden or large amount of bleeding or swelling
  - > Apply firm pressure to the site, lie down, and call 911
- Significant numbness or tingling in your hand or leg
- Hand or leg becomes cold
- Tightness, significant swelling, or a lump at your procedure site.
- Unusual pain in your groin, leg or arm

Do not try to drive yourself to the hospital. An ambulance will arrive as quickly as possible.

### **What symptoms are considered urgent?**

The following signs and symptoms need to be treated before they become an emergency. Call your doctor if you have any of the signs or symptoms listed below:

- Temperature above 100.5°F taken under the tongue
- Bleeding, increased bruising, redness, swelling, increased pain, yellow or green drainage, or foul smelling drainage near your procedure site
- Increased swelling in your legs or ankles
- Weight gain of more than 5 pounds in 3 days or weight loss of more than 7 pounds before your follow up clinic visit
- Trouble urinating
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Stomach pain or bloating
- Chills or excessive sweating
- A vague feeling that something is wrong

### **What is the number to call?**

Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm: **Call (888) 287-1082** and ask to speak to a cardiology nurse if you have any of the signs or symptoms listed above.

After 5pm or on weekends or holidays: **Call (734) 936-6267** and ask to speak with the cardiology resident on call.

## Instructions for Care after a Heart Procedure

If you had a heart procedure performed during your hospital stay, the information below will help you care for yourself when you go home.

### What can I expect after my heart procedure?

Your procedure was performed in the femoral artery in your groin (the area at the top of your thigh) or the radial artery in your arm. It is normal to experience the following at your procedure site:

- Tenderness or discomfort
- Bruising (may take 2-3 weeks to go away)
- A small lump or knot (about the size of a quarter) that should go away after 7 to 10 days.
- A small amount of bleeding from the site for 48 hours after the procedure

### How do I care for my procedure site?

- Wash your procedure site daily with soap and water.
- Remove the bandage over the site after 24 hours, unless there is drainage.
- Keep the area clean and dry when you are not showering.
- **Do not** use creams, lotions, powders, or ointment on the site until it heals.
- **Do not** soak in a bath, hot tub, or swim in a pool or lake for one week after your procedure. If your wrist was used for the procedure, **do not** wash dishes by hand for the first 7 days.

### What are my activity instructions after my procedure?

- Avoid strenuous activities for the first 4 days. This includes most sports - jogging, golfing, playing tennis, and bowling.
- Support your procedure site with your hand when coughing or sneezing.
- If the doctor put the catheter in your arm:
  - > **Do not** lift, push, or pull more than 3 pounds for the next 7 days and then 10 pounds for the next 5 weeks.
- If the doctor put the catheter in your groin:
  - > **Do not** lift, push or pull more than 10 pounds for the next 6 weeks.



## When can I resume my normal activities after I go home?

Before you leave the hospital, your health care team will discuss with you when you can resume different types of exercise or activity. Your ability to return to normal physical activity will be based on the amount of damage to your heart, complications from your hospital stay, and procedures or treatments you received. Once you return to the clinic, your health care team can provide more detailed advice about a recommended plan to increase your activity level.

Some people will be able to do more after a heart attack. Others may have to start more slowly. Increase your activity level gradually by following the instructions below.

### Walking

- Start by walking up to 10 minutes twice a day. Increase the amount you walk each day by one or two minutes until you are able to do 20 minutes per walk.
- Only move to the next stage when you meet your walking target without discomfort.
- Once you can walk 20 minutes, walk once a day for 20-30 minutes. Increase the length of time you walk by a few minutes every day.
- If walking causes chest pain, shortness of breath, or any of the symptoms you had before or during your heart attack, **stop** right away.
- **Do not** walk outside if it is very cold or very hot. Go to a shopping mall and do your walking inside.

### Return to Work

Returning to work is a very important part of your overall recovery. Most patients go back to work 2 weeks to 3 months after they go home from the hospital. Your return to work depends on how fast you recover and the type of work you do. If you have a physically demanding job, you may need to build up your strength first. Do not return to work until you have seen your provider at the first follow up clinic visit.

## **Household Activities**

Until your first follow-up appointment limit household chores to only light activities, such as meal preparation, dusting, or washing dishes. **Do not** do any work outside if it is very cold or very hot. **Do not** lift, push, or pull anything heavier than 10 pounds for the first 6 weeks after you go home. If you had a heart procedure performed through the radial artery in your wrist, **do not** lift, push, or pull more than 3 pounds for the next 7 days and then 10 pounds for the next 5 weeks.

## **Climbing Stairs**

You can climb stairs as soon as you go home, unless you have been told differently in the hospital. Limit the number of trips you take up and down the stairs until your first clinic appointment.

## **Traveling**

**By car (passenger):** You can start this immediately. Avoid sitting for more than 2 hours at a time. Stop often and walk for a few minutes.

**By air:** You can usually start this right away, but ask your health care team if you have any restrictions before leaving the hospital. Remember, air travel often involves a lot of lifting, standing, and walking. These may limit your ability to travel by air.

## **Driving**

You may be able to resume driving soon after you have been discharged home. Your doctor will discuss with you when you can drive again.

## **Sexual Activity and Intimacy**

After a heart attack, you are usually able to resume sexual activity after 1-3 weeks. The exertion needed to perform sexual intercourse is similar to climbing stairs or walking around the block at a brisk pace. If these activities are not difficult for you, you may resume sexual activities whenever you feel ready. It is normal for both partners to be worried about resuming sexual activity after a heart attack. Many people worry sexual intercourse may cause discomfort and/or strain on the heart. Your best indicator is how you feel both physically and emotionally.

### **Some general guidelines for resuming sexual activity include:**

- Choose a time when you are well rested and not stressed.
- Wait 1 to 3 hours after a meal so that digestion can take place.
- If you are not ready for sex, there are other intimate activities that you can do such as kissing, holding hands, or massage to express your feelings for your partner.
- Talk to your provider if you have any concerns.

## **How can I save energy while performing daily activities?**

It is important to make the most of the energy you have after a heart attack. **Energy conservation** is one method you can use. Energy conservation involves changing the way you perform everyday activities so you do not become tired or weak.

### **The Key Principles of Energy Conservation:**

#### **Prioritizing:**

- When you have several things to accomplish, make a list and decide what is most important.
- Use your energy to perform the most important task first. Then perform the rest of your list, as your energy allows.

#### **Planning:**

- Plan to get a good night's sleep.
- Develop a complete mental plan before performing an activity.
- Determine how long activities will take and what supplies you need to complete them.

#### **Pacing:**

- Rest before you feel over-tired.
- Practice abdominal breathing during rest breaks.
- Inhale through your nose while expanding your belly and exhale through your mouth while relaxing your belly (“Smell the roses, blow out the candles”)

#### **Positioning:**

- Store items between your eye and hip level.
- Store items where you use them most.
  - > For example: Place reading material within reach of your chair.

Energy conservation involves changing the way you perform everyday activities so you do not become tired or weak.

### **How can I apply energy conservation into my daily routine?**

#### **Scheduling activities**

- Simplify your tasks and set realistic goals.
- Do not schedule too many activities in one day.
- Do not plan activities for immediately after a meal.
- Do the activities that take more energy when you are feeling your best.
- Rest before and after activities.

#### **Showering**

- Use a shower chair or tub bench.
- Use lukewarm water, since hot water and steam may make you short of breath and drowsy.
- Keep the shower door open slightly to help eliminate steam.
- Use prescribed oxygen, if you find showering to be too tiring.
- Wear a terry cloth robe to dry your body.
- Sit while shaving, brushing your teeth, etc.

#### **Getting dressed**

- Wear clothes that have zippers and buttons in the front so you do not have to reach behind yourself.
- Dress your lower body first as this uses more energy.
- Bring your feet up to you, rather than bending down.

#### **Moving Items**

- Push or slide items rather than lifting.
- Use a cart or wagon to avoid making multiple trips.

#### **Other tips**

- Ask for help.
- Use assistive devices and tools such as walkers, handheld shower heads, or long handled tools for dressing.

## Cardiac Rehabilitation

### What is Cardiac Rehabilitation?

Cardiac Rehabilitation is a program designed to teach you how to be more active and make lifestyle changes that can lead to a stronger heart and better health. Your cardiac rehabilitation program will be tailored to your needs and based on the amount of damage to your heart and health status. We use a patient and family centered approach to empower patients towards better health.

### What happens in Cardiac Rehabilitation?

In Cardiac Rehabilitation you will learn how to:

- Exercise safely under the supervision of a certified exercise physiologist.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet under the supervision of a registered dietician.
- Reduce your risk factors.
- Reduce stress and depression.

### What are the benefits of Cardiac Rehabilitation?

The benefits of a Cardiac Rehabilitation program include:

- Improvement in risk factors.
- Improvement in symptoms.
- Lower risk for a heart attack or dying from heart disease.
- Better overall health and a better quality of life.
- Improvement in energy level and ability to return to usual activities.
- Improvement in taking medications correctly and safely.
- Prevention of future hospital stays.
- Feeling more hopeful and less depressed, stressed, or worried.

**The 1-year death rate was reduced by nearly 60% in patients who participated in Cardiac Rehabilitation vs. patients who did not.**

Research studies have found that people who completed a cardiac rehabilitation program after having a heart attack had lower death rates compared to those who did not. This improvement was seen even 5 years after participation.

### **How can I enroll in Cardiac Rehabilitation?**

Your doctor will order this for you while you are still in the hospital.

### **How will a heart attack effect my emotional health?**



Recovering from a heart attack also involves your emotional healing. The recovery process uses both emotional and physical energy. While everyone's reaction to a heart attack differs, you may feel:

- Sad
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Guilty
- Fearful
- Worried
- Irritable
- Uncertain
- Disappointed
- Surprised
- Weepy
- Lonely
- Grateful
- Contemplative
- Relieved
- Enlightened
- Motivated

Approximately 20-30% of people experience symptoms of depression after a heart attack.

While having a range of emotions is normal, sometimes having a heart attack can lead to depression. Approximately 2-3 out of 10 people who had a heart attack experience depression. Depression can impact your ability to recover and may put you at risk for future health concerns.

**Symptoms of depression may include:**

- Feeling sad, depressed, angry, anxious, or overwhelmed
- Not feeling up to doing things you used to enjoy
- Eating too much or too little
- Not sleeping well, sleeping too much, or being unable to fall asleep
- Crying frequently or easily
- Being unable to focus or concentrate
- Having inconsistent or unpredictable moods
- Feeling agitated or irritable
- Feeling restless or nervous
- Thinking about death or not wanting to live
- Having little or no energy
- Being forgetful
- Being uninterested in sex or intimacy

It is okay to  
ask for help.

Call  
734-232-1559

If you experience any of these symptoms for **longer than two weeks**, contact your heart doctor or primary care doctor for help and support.

Please remember that it is okay to ask for help. You have been through a lot. Your primary care doctor or heart doctor can:

- Evaluate your emotional recovery
- Determine if further support is needed
- Connect you to extra support services so you can feel your best

Social workers can also help you cope with your emotions. We have social workers in both the inpatient and outpatient settings at Michigan Medicine. You can contact the Frankel Cardiovascular Center social worker at **734-232-1559**.



Remember, you are never alone. If you find yourself thinking about not wanting to live anymore, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides free and confidential support. Their phone number is **800-273-8255**. Chat options are also available through their website <https://suicideprevention-lifeline.org/>.



### **How do I handle my emotions after I get home?**

Once you are home, even though you may feel drained physically and emotionally, it's important for you to follow guidelines for good self-care.

#### **Here are some things you can do to help yourself recover:**

- Get dressed daily.
- Walk daily within your limits.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Resume hobbies and social activities you enjoy.
- Visit with others.
- Make sure you have a support system in place that can help with your physical and emotional needs. Discussing your fears, frustrations, pain, concerns, and successes with someone is an important part of the healing process.
- Join a support group.
- Ask for help when you need it.

As you resume your normal activities, you will notice gradual improvement in your mood and outlook.







Your family and friends need to balance their own feelings while trying to support your recovery.

Heart attacks are stressful for all people involved, not just the patient. Friends and family may have additional responsibilities helping with your care while managing things inside and outside of the home. Because of this, it is important for your loved ones to take care of themselves physically and emotionally.

**If you are a family member or friend, here are some tips:**

- Don't neglect your own needs. Eat well, stay active, and get plenty of rest.
- Be patient – it is not unusual for your loved one to have good or bad days.
- Share your feelings with a close friend.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed. Be specific about your needs such as meals, chores, pet-sitting, time alone, etc.
- Talk to your family doctor if you have feelings that are concerning.
- Do something you enjoy and find relaxing.

