

Safe Activities after Heart or Lung Surgery

Protecting your chest after surgery

After chest surgery, it is important to protect your surgical cut (incision) so it will heal. Follow the guidelines below unless your health care team gives you different advice.

Weeks 1 to 8

You may lift items under 10 pounds. If needed, use both arms together. You may also do light household tasks. **Stop your activity if you feel or hear clicking in your chest or have pain.**

- **No reaching overhead for the first 2 weeks.**
 - After 2 weeks, you may reach overhead, but not repeatedly. If needed, reach with both arms together.
- **No reaching backward with both arms at the same time for the first 2 weeks.**
- **No activities that pull on your arms (walking the dog, pulling open a heavy door) or that cause chest pain or strain.**
- **No pushing, pulling or lifting anything that weighs over 10 pounds, such as:**
 - Pushing a stroller.
 - Pulling laundry out of the dryer.
 - Vacuuming, raking, mowing or other heavy work.
 - Lifting a full bag of groceries (10 to 12 pounds) or a full basket of laundry (25 pounds).

Weeks 9 to 12

You may lift items under 30 pounds. If needed, use both arms together. After 12 weeks, there are no lifting restrictions unless your doctor tells you differently.

Going back to work

Ask your doctor when you can return to work.

- If your job involves physical labor, it may be 12 weeks before you can go back to work.
- If you have a desk job, plan to take at least a month off of work.

Tips for daily activities

Getting into bed

1. Sit near the head of the bed (so your head will be on the pillow when you lie down).
2. Gently lower yourself onto your side and bring your feet onto the bed.
3. Roll from your side to your back (you may want to cross your arms over your chest or hug a pillow). **Do not reach behind you.**
4. When needed, use your legs to help you change positions.

Getting out of bed

1. Bend your knees.
2. Roll to your side. You may want to cross your arms over your chest or hug a pillow.
3. Hang your legs over the side of the bed.
4. Gently use your elbow for support as you come to a sitting position.

Standing up

1. Scoot your hips to the edge of the chair or bed.
2. Lean forward so your shoulders are over your knees.
3. To protect your chest, cross your arms over your chest or hug a pillow.
4. Use your leg strength to stand up.
5. If you need to use your arms to help balance, your therapist will show you safe ways to stand up or how to use a walker.
6. Use a raised toilet seat if it is hard to get up from the toilet.

Sitting down

1. Make sure you feel the bed or chair at the back of your legs. To protect your chest, cross your arms over your chest or hug a pillow.
2. Use your leg strength to lower yourself.
3. If you need to use your arms for balance, your therapist will show you safe ways to sit or how to use a walker.

Showering and self care

- It is okay to use your arms for your daily needs, such as washing or combing hair or brushing teeth, as long as you avoid strain.
- No tub baths or hot tubs for 8 weeks.
- Once your doctor says you may shower, follow these tips:
 - Do **not** get the spray directly on your incision.
 - Do **not** rub the incision. Clean the area by patting it.
 - Use a bath chair if it is hard to get out of the tub or shower.
 - Avoid pulling on a grab bar, especially with only one hand.

Getting dressed

- Do **not** reach overhead or behind your back if it strains your chest.
- Do **not** reach back with both arms at the same time.
- Your therapist can show you ways to dress or tools that can help.

Exercise and rehab

During the first 8 weeks, it is important to work toward getting stronger. What to do:

- Follow the exercise advice your therapist gave you.
- Pay attention to your posture. Stand straight and avoid rounding your shoulders so you don't get stiff or sore.
- Follow your cardiac rehab or pulmonary rehab schedule. Attend for at least 12 weeks or as instructed by your therapist.