

HEART ATTACK

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?



Blood is pumped around the body by the heart. To keep your heart healthy, the muscles of your heart need to be supplied with blood by the coronary arteries. If one of the coronary arteries becomes blocked, for example by a blood clot, part of your heart may be starved of oxygen and become permanently damaged. This is what happens if you have a heart attack. One important aspect of recovery from a heart attack is to change your lifestyle. This may include being more physically active, eating more healthily and if you smoke, stopping.

The information in this leaflet can help you start some physical activity, but it is also recommended that you seek professional advice from a British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation Phase IV trained individual on how to gain the greatest benefit from your activity (see back page for contact details).

REHABILITATION AFTER HEART SURGERY

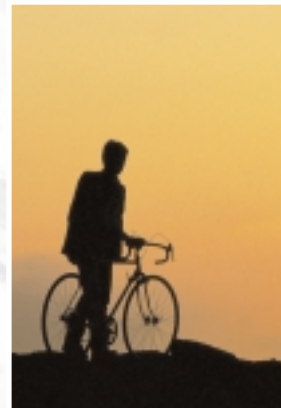
There are four phases of cardiac rehabilitation:

Phase I – Immediately after the event in the coronary care unit. You should be given guidance on modifying risk factors in your daily lifestyle.

Phase II – The first few weeks at home. Physical activity is an important part of your rehabilitation and it needs to become a regular part of your lifestyle.

Phase III – This consists of a formal exercise-based comprehensive rehabilitation programme and usually starts 3-6 weeks after your cardiac event. It may last for anything between 6 weeks up to a year.

Phase IV – This phase concentrates on the role of long-term exercise. It doesn't necessarily need to be supervised but periodic monitoring of symptoms, risk factors and medication by your GP or cardiac nurse is advisable.



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Staying safe continued

- It is particularly important to warm up and warm down properly as this helps the heart adjust slowly to the increased demand for blood from the muscles.
- If you get angina, it may be useful to use your GTN tablet or spray before starting to exercise.
- If the pattern of your angina changes, eg. becomes more frequent or severe or comes on at lower levels of activity or at rest, you should see your GP.

If you get any of the following problems stop and speak to your GP or contact NHS Direct:

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness when you are active
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

Qualified instructors

It is important to check that your Phase IV instructor is suitably qualified either as a medical professional (such as a nurse or physiotherapist) or an exercise professional who has trained specifically in cardiac rehabilitation through a course such as the Phase IV Instructor Training run by the British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation (BACR) (see box below for contact details).

Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

Be active - be safe - have fun!

For more information

- British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation Phase IV trained professionals 01252 720640
- BBC Online Health www.bbc.co.uk/health/heart
- British Heart Foundation 020 7935 0185 or www.bhf.org.uk
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.co.uk
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity www.sportex.net

Local information

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AFTER A HEART ATTACK

How does physical activity help if you have had a heart attack?

- Physical activity will help reduce the risk of dying from another heart attack by around 25%.
- With regular physical activity there is a good chance you will be able to become fitter than you were before your heart attack.
- Physical activity can reduce the harmful effects of cholesterol as well as reduce the tendency of the blood to clot - two important risk factors in coronary heart disease.
- It also reduces other risk factors for heart disease such as high blood cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, the risk of developing diabetes and being overweight.
- Physical activity can reduce the risk of having a stroke.
- In addition physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress, improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life and helps you to sleep well.
- It also reduces the risk of bowel cancer, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.

What type of activity is best?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health when you have had a heart attack, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

Stamina-type activities: Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

Strength-type activities: Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (gentle mowing) and housework

Flexibility-type activities: Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator start by walking part of the way up and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

How much and how often?

Frequency Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

Intensity Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

Advice Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

Remember Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.

Staying safe

- Before you take part in any physical activity that isn't supervised by a medical professional, you must make sure you have recovered fully from your heart attack and completed your rehabilitation (ideally through a hospital or community-based programme). Check either with your GP, or cardiac nurse at the hospital where you did your rehabilitation - how much and what sort of activity you can safely do.
- They can also advise you on how any medicines you are taking may affect you during activity. For example beta-blockers reduce your heart rate so when exercising don't use your heart rate as a way of telling how hard you are working, or when to slow down.
- Concentrate on the stamina-type activities listed above and avoid 'high intensity resistance training', for example lifting heavy weights.
- Try not to do any heavy manual jobs outdoors when it is cold, and avoid exercising after a heavy meal. Both of these put extra strain on the heart.