

How do I use my GTN spray or tablets?

If you regularly get angina when walking or doing any activity, try either reducing your level of exertion or taking your GTN before you start. This should mean that you can walk further before the chest pain comes on. If you do get angina you should stop any activity you are doing first and then use one dose of the spray under your tongue or put a tablet under your tongue and let it dissolve. It is best to sit down while taking your GTN medication as it can make you feel lightheaded. The GTN takes effect very quickly and the pain should go away. If your angina is not relieved within five minutes of taking the first dose, take a second dose. If the pain still does not go away, take a third dose. If you have taken three doses and the pain is still bad, you must dial 999. 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.

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



If you have experienced any of the following heart conditions, physical activity is likely to be beneficial:

- Heart attack
- Coronary artery by-pass graft
- Angioplasty
- Transplant
- Valve replacements

In some cases you may need to undergo further investigations before participating in an exercise programme - for example if you have unstable angina (not controlled by medication), unstable or acute heart failure or a resting systolic blood pressure of more than 180mmHg or a diastolic pressure of more than 100mmHg.

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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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND CARDIAC REHABILITATION

How does physical activity help in rehabilitation?

- Regular physical activity can improve the blood supply to the heart muscle. This helps reduce your risk of suffering from another heart attack or from experiencing irregular patterns of heart beats (arrhythmias).
- As the heart muscle gets fitter through physical activity the heart rate and blood pressure decrease which means the heart doesn't have to work as hard as before, for a given amount of work. This means it is less likely to become short of oxygen and if you suffer from angina you are less likely to experience symptoms or you will be able to do more activity before experiencing the symptoms.
- Physical activity also helps to reduce a number of other risk factors in heart disease including high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight and the risk of developing diabetes.
- Other benefits include reductions in the risk of several types of cancers, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.
- It also helps reduce anxiety, depression and stress, and improves your overall feeling of well-being as well as helping you sleep better.

What type of activity is best?

Activities at Phase IV may include both supervised and independent exercise. It is important that these activities become a regular part of your life so try and pick ones that you enjoy and that are affordable. A mix of exercises are good, with stamina-type activities being most important.

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

Strength-type activities: Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or 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

- To prevent blood pooling when exercising, keep your legs and toes moving particularly when you are standing during activities.
 - Exercise that involves lying down should be done after the cool down.
 - Avoid long sustained actions with your hands held above your head as this requires an unnecessary increase in the function of your heart.
 - Avoid holding your breath as you exercise as this increases the heart's workload.
 - Try not to do any heavy manual jobs outdoors when it is cold, and avoid exercising after a heavy meal. Both of these increase the work your heart is required to do.
 - Do not exercise if you are unwell, or if you have a temperature or chest infection.
 - Using a GTN spray or tablet before an activity can help. See next page.
- If you get any of the following problems stop exercising and ask for medical advice
- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity.
 - Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness, dizziness or nausea.
 - Fainting or palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.