

After a Heart Attack: Your Recovery Guide

Medical-Surgical · Cardiovascular

A heart attack happens when a blocked artery stops blood flow to part of your heart muscle. Cardiac rehab, a slow return to activity, and daily medicines help your heart heal and prevent another heart attack.

Join cardiac rehab

- Cardiac rehab is a supervised exercise and teaching program for your heart.
- It helps you live longer and stay out of the hospital.
- Ask your care team to sign you up before you go home.

Build up activity slowly

- Walk every day, adding a few minutes at a time.
- Do not lift, push, or pull heavy things until your provider says it is safe.
- Stop and rest if you have chest pain, shortness of breath, or dizziness.
- Ask when you can drive, work, and have sex. Sex is usually safe once you climb 2 flights of stairs without symptoms.

Take your heart medicines

- Aspirin and a second anti-clot pill keep your stent open. **Never stop them unless your heart doctor says so.**
- A beta blocker eases your heart's work. A statin lowers cholesterol. An ACE inhibitor protects your heart muscle.
- Take each one every day, even when you feel well.

Use nitroglycerin for chest pain

- Stop, sit, and place 1 tablet under your tongue.
- Never use it with sildenafil, tadalafil, or vardenafil.

Care for your feelings

- Sadness is common. Tell your care team if it lasts 2 weeks or more.

Call your provider today if you have

- Bleeding gums, nosebleeds, or new bruises
- More shortness of breath, weight gain, or swollen feet
- Dizziness or a cough that will not go away
- Sadness lasting 2 weeks or more

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Chest pain not better 5 minutes after the first nitroglycerin
- New or worse chest pain, or chest pain at rest
- Black, sticky stool or vomiting blood
- Fainting, severe trouble breathing, or thoughts of hurting yourself

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/after-heart-attack-recovery/patient

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