



Preparing for your Cardiothoracic Surgery

*Baton Rouge General Physicians
Cardiovascular & Thoracic Specialists*



**Baton Rouge General
Physicians**



Cardiac, thoracic and vascular surgery.

As Baton Rouge General Physicians and Cardiovascular & Thoracic Specialists, we are dedicated to providing compassionate, innovative, and personalized solutions for people fighting cardiovascular and pulmonary disease.

Supported by a cohesive multidisciplinary team, we provide comprehensive diagnosis and expert treatment for diseases of the chest and are committed to clinical excellence and a holistic approach to your care.

While cardiovascular and thoracic care is our passion and what each of our specialists have spent years preparing to do, we understand that your introduction to this highly specialized field may have been very sudden.

Hopefully, many of your questions about your condition and matters related to your care will be answered in the following pages.



SHAVING AND PREOPERATIVE SHOWERING

Preparing or “prepping” your skin before surgery reduces the risk of infection at the incision site. To help you with this process, we are providing these instructions. You will be provided a bottle of antiseptic skin cleanser. Please follow these instructions carefully.

SHAVING

- If at all possible, avoid shaving the area where your incision will be located for a least one week prior to your surgery.
- If this is not possible, do not shave the incision site the night prior to your surgery.

SHOWERING OR BATHING THE NIGHT BEFORE YOUR SURGERY

- If possible, take a shower instead of a bath.
- Apply the antiseptic skin cleanser to a wet, clean washcloth and lather your entire body from the neck down. Use about ½ of the liquid in the bottle.
- **NEVER** use the antiseptic skin cleanser on your face, near your eyes, or to clean the inside of your ears.
- Gently wash your body and focus the scrub on the area where your incision(s) will be located for about three minutes. Avoid scrubbing your skin too hard.
- Rinse the antiseptic skin cleanser off your body completely.
- Pat yourself dry with a clean towel.
- Do NOT apply lotions or powder.
- Put on clean, freshly washed clothes following your shower.

SHOWERING OR BATHING THE MORNING OF YOUR SURGERY

- Repeat the above procedure using clean, freshly washed towels and the rest of the antiseptic cleanser.
- Put on clean, freshly washed clothes in preparation for your admission to the hospital for your surgery.

*If you are unable to bathe or shower, follow the above procedures, sponge cleaning the area where your incision(s) will be located.





What to expect after Cardiac Surgery

Although everyone recovers at a different rate, you'll need about six to eight weeks of healing before you can go back to your normal routine. During that time, keep in touch with your doctor and follow his or her instructions.

Recovering From Open Heart Surgery is a Family Affair

Open heart surgery is an event that affects the patient, spouse, children and significant others. In addition to the physical recovery that the patient undergoes, there is an emotional aspect of adjustment that the patient and family will experience.

Facing the possibility of changing one's lifestyle can be quite overwhelming. Some alterations take place immediately, such as diet changes and smoking cessation. Other changes may be more gradual, such as building up to and maintaining an exercise program, or incorporating long term stress management. It is important to all those involved to realize the patient has control in initiating the changes and in maintaining healthy new habits. This is the patient's responsibility.

Spouses, children, and significant others often struggle with the impossible task of making sure the patient never deviates off course and stays on the "straight and narrow." Remember, others can assist and encourage **but only the patient can do!** Keep in mind that recovering from open heart surgery often creates temporary role changes and responsibility shifts among family members as well. When the recovering patient returns home, he/she will have modified physical abilities and need for assistance from family members until the patient rebuilds his/her strength. Just as the family needs to coordinate efforts in assisting the patient during his/her limitation phase, so should they enable him/her to increase independence and regain a healthy level of self-reliance. This proves to be a very delicate balance and can be a cause of tension during the recovery phase. Staying informed of the doctor's recommendations on how the patient should progress can minimize the stress of this transitional period for both the patient and family.

Recovery will be a challenge for the open heart surgery patient and his/her family. There will be days of high energy and of fatigue, accomplishments, moments of temptation, feelings of exuberance and even days of feeling blue or angry, all of which are a part of the physical and emotional healing process that takes place.

General Post-Operative Instructions

Many questions arise as to what you should do or should not do after discharge. The following are answers to the most common concerns and questions:

- While the sternum (breastbone) is healing, you will use modified arm movements to minimize stress on your chest while allowing for maximum participation in daily activities using the concepts of Keep Your Move in The Tube. The sternum usually takes about eight - 12 weeks to heal.
- Showers are allowed but tub baths are discouraged for about two weeks or until your incisions are healed. Avoid extremely hot water which may cause you to feel dizzy or weak. You may gently wash (don't rub) your incision with soap. Do not use creams, lotions, ointments or salves on incisions until they are fully healed.
- When you are upset, your heart works harder. It is best to anticipate and avoid situations, people or topics of conversation that make you tense or angry.
- Remember that your diet, medications and exercise are prescribed specifically for you. Do not expect your friend or neighbor who has a heart condition to have the same prescriptions. Keep a record of your medications and medical history with you at all times.
- It is important to space and pace your activities to minimize fatigue. Daily physical activity is essential! Slow walks and frequent excursions are recommended at least three times per day. Stair climbing is not discouraged, however, avoid pulling yourself up with a handrail and go slowly. If you feel tired, STOP, and rest for a while.
- A rest period should be taken at least once a day for a few weeks. Napping is not necessary, but resting is. Be sure to dress daily in street clothes. You are on your way to recovery!
- Avoid driving a car for four to six weeks after surgery. Your reaction time will be delayed due to weakness, fatigue, and medication. You do not want to risk hitting the steering wheel and re-injuring the sternum. When riding in a car for long distances, stop every one to two hours to stretch your legs. This will improve circulation in your legs and help prevent swelling.





Sex After Surgery

Sexual intercourse requires energy, therefore a waiting time of one to three weeks is generally recommended. Being near someone, holding, fondling, caressing, are all activities that enhance closeness and pleasure. Because these activities require very little energy, you may engage in these any time after discharge from the hospital. Many couples find that this expression of love allows them to return slowly to a full sex life with confidence.

When you do return to sexual intercourse, keep in mind that the sternum has been cut and modification may be necessary in order to prevent injury to the sternum or incisional pain. As you engage in the home walking program and have increased endurance and confidence, you will know when you are ready. The person recovering after open heart surgery may be more conscious of his or her heartbeat, breathing and muscle tension. This awareness is normal and is no cause for alarm.

Fear of performance and general depression are two psychological factors that can greatly reduce sexual interest and capacity. These are considered normal during recovery and in most cases disappear within three months. If depression continues after three to six months, professional counseling should be considered.

Various medications may affect sexual drive and/or function. If this occurs, consult your physician. Often a change in medication or dosage can remedy the problem. Never stop taking any prescribed medication without your physician's approval.

Ways to Prepare for the Resumption of Sexual Activity:

- *The first step is to exercise.*
- *The second step is to be tolerant of emotions. For a brief time following open heart surgery, emotions are delicately balanced and subject to rapid mood swings. Remember that a good sense of humor is a good ally.*
- *The third step is to try to adjust mutual sexual expectations. Emotional response as well as physical responses sometimes make the resumption of sexual relations fearful and that is normal. Therefore, don't expect too much at first.*
- *Be relaxed and rested before intercourse. Avoid sex if you are fatigued or upset.*
- *Choose a position that does not restrict breathing or require prolonged muscular support.*
- *Speak with your physician if you are experiencing any chest pain, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, or extreme fatigue in relation to sexual activity.*
- *Wait at least one hour after a meal or alcoholic beverages before having sexual activity. Open communication is important between partners.*





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