

*Activity and
Exercise
Guidelines
After a
Heart Attack*






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EXAMPLES

DAILY ACTIVITIES	EXERCISE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> household tasks personal care activities job / employment going to school volunteer work leisure activities hobbies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> walking cycling 

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

People need to be active to be healthy. After a heart attack it is important to gradually resume your physical activities. The benefits of daily physical activity are to:

- help get you back into a normal routine
- help cope with stress
- help you gain confidence in your physical ability
- improve your self-image
- improve the strength in your muscles and bones
- help take away feelings of depression

Being physically active has added benefits for someone who has had a heart attack or has heart disease. The additional benefits of regular exercise are to:

- help reduce your risk of having another heart attack
- help control or reduce weight
- help control high blood pressure
- improve your cholesterol level
- improve control of blood sugar in people who have diabetes
- improve blood circulation
- make your heart and lungs work more efficiently
- make you feel more energetic



MALL WALKING PROGRAMS (CALGARY)

- **Beddington Town Square** (275-7971)
Open Monday to Friday 7 a.m.; Saturday/Sunday 8 a.m.
No formal program
- **Chinook Centre Mall** (259-2022 or 255-0613 after 5 p.m.)
Open 7 a.m. Registration at Customer Service (map of mall available) Called “Soles Mates” walking program
- **Deerfoot Mall** (274-7024)
Open 7:30 a.m.
No formal program
- **Deer Valley Mall** (271-3300)
Open 7 a.m.
No formal program
- **Franklin Mall** (273-2122)
Open 8:30 a.m.
- **Market Mall** (288-5467)
Open 7 a.m. Monday to Saturday; 9 a.m. Sunday
(Royal Bank doors) Called “Heart and Sole” walking club
- **Marlborough Mall** (272-9233) “Ticker Troupe” walking club
Open 7 a.m.
Registration at Customer Service
- **Midnapore Mall** (256-0626 or 256-0631)
Open 7 a.m.
No formal program
- **North Hill Mall** (289-6761) “Heart and Sole” walking program
Open 7:30 a.m.
Registration at Shoppers Drug Mart

All of these benefits are within your reach by following the guidelines in this booklet.

The Heart Health team hopes that you have found this information helpful. Remember these guidelines only apply to the **first six weeks** following your heart attack. Our goal is to help you recover from your heart attack and to have a “healthy” heart. It is important to develop a regular exercise program as part of your ongoing lifestyle. For further information please talk to your family doctor and cardiologist.

ADDITIONAL READING

“Sexuality and Heart Disease”

Calgary Regional Health Authority

“Energy Conservation and Work Simplification”

Calgary Regional Health Authority

“Air Travel with a Heart Condition”

Calgary Regional Health Authority



These booklets are available free-of-charge and can be obtained from any member of the Heart Health team.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Alberta Heart and Stroke Foundation

1825 Park Road S.E., Calgary AB T2G 3Y6 (403) 264-5549

Cardiac Wellness Institute of Calgary Inc. (Cardiac Rehabilitation Program)

Lindsay Park Sports Centre
2225 Macleod Tr S, Calgary AB T2G 5B6 (403) 571-6950

For more information and the opportunity to have your questions answered, feel free to attend any of the following classes following your discharge:

- Rockyview General Hospital Phone: 541-3556
- Peter Lougheed Centre Phone: 291-8069
- Foothills Medical Centre Phone: 670-4193 / 670-8078

You do not need to register for these classes. Check the schedule in your package of Educational Materials for more details.

WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ON THE HEART?

Performing daily activities and exercise can increase the workload of the heart by:

- 1) raising heart rate; and
- 2) raising blood pressure.

During your healing period it is important to stay within your limits and not overwork the heart. This means starting out slow and gradually resuming your normal activities.

NOTE: *Following your heart attack, you should not experience any chest pain or angina while doing any form of activity. However, if you have angina during activity you should stop what you are doing and take your nitroglycerin as instructed. If your angina is not relieved by nitroglycerin and rest, call your doctor or cardiologist or go to the Emergency Department.*

1 ACTIVITY IN THE FIRST SIX WEEKS

Physical activities are divided into three levels: **light, moderate, vigorous**. You should start out with “light” activities and gradually work up to a “vigorous” level. Go slow at first and find out what level is comfortable for you. Here are some examples of activities that require **light, moderate, vigorous** effort.

Light	Moderate	Vigorous
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • light housework (dusting, setting the table, making meals, doing dishes, etc) • setting & drying hair, shaving, bathing or showering • grocery shopping • doing dishes, wiping off countertop • handicrafts - model building, needlecraft • replacing a light bulb • easy gardening • light walking • picking up /holding children for a short time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walking and carrying groceries • raking leaves • mowing the lawn • shovelling light snow • carrying a child, pushing a stroller for a long distance • vacuuming, washing floors • brisk walking • dancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shovelling heavy snow • carrying heavy luggage, etc for a long period of time • jogging • fast dancing <p>Any activity that uses arms above your head such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • painting • wallpapering • home renovations



Remember, these are just examples. You may have activities in your daily life that are not listed here OR you may need to do some activities that require more intense effort. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't do these types of activities. It means that you should know when you are pushing yourself and how you can work within your limits. If you have questions about what you "can or cannot do" talk to your doctor or cardiologist.

WAYS TO HELP YOU DO THESE ACTIVITIES SAFELY

Here are some ways to help you resume your activities safely:

- ♥ avoid working with your arms over your head for long periods of time
- ♥ take breaks as needed in-between your activities
- ♥ avoid straining (e.g. lifting an object that is too heavy)
- ♥ do not hold your breath when you lift or push something
- ♥ pace yourself and break up activities into small amounts as needed
- ♥ If you become tired or feel any chest pain or discomfort, stop what you are doing and rest! If your chest pain continues, take your Nitroglycerin as instructed.

NOTE: For more information refer to the booklet "Energy Conservation and Work Simplification".



RETURN TO WORK

The time to return to work will vary for each person and depends on many things. You should talk to your doctor or cardiologist about returning to work when you have your follow-up appointment/check up. (Be sure to make a follow-up appointment when you get home.)

People recovering from a heart attack usually return to work 4 to 8 weeks after their discharge from hospital. The length of time depends on the extent of your heart attack and the type of work you do. It is important that you are well rested before you go back to work. This may mean that you will require a longer leave from your job if it involves heavy work, long hours, high stress or a lot of traveling.

All of the above guidelines also apply to any community service work or volunteering.

You should check with your doctor before you return to work

LEISURE TIME

Leisure time is a good way to help manage stress and helps you recover from your heart attack. Leisure time should be built into your daily routine so it won't be missed.

Try to balance the activities you want to do or enjoy with those you must do. Hobbies should not involve heavy lifting or carrying, or anything that involves holding or working with your arms overhead. Some examples are:

- ♥ baking
- ♥ arts and crafts
- ♥ light indoor/outdoor gardening
- ♥ light carpentry -e.g., building model airplanes
- ♥ playing musical instruments (e.g., piano, flute)
- ♥ photography
- ♥ bird watching
- ♥ reading
- ♥ playing cards



Again, do not overtire yourself in doing these hobbies. Stop when you feel tired and pace yourself.

RESUMING SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Sexual activity increases the workload of the heart and is considered a form of physical activity. Please refer to the booklet "Sexuality and Heart Disease" for guidelines to resume sex in your life. These guidelines will help you resume sexual activity as soon as you feel ready to do so.

STAIRS

You may find climbing stairs is hard work for you at first. Try to cut down on the number of times you use the stairs at your home or at work. Plan ahead to avoid making too many trips to your basement or upstairs room(s). Allow others to make the trip for you.

If you find it difficult to climb stairs, here are some suggestions to make them easier:

- ♥ Go slowly!
- ♥ Rest when you need to by leaning on the railing or resting your back against the wall.
- ♥ To go up the stairs, put both feet on each step before going on to the next.
- ♥ If you are short of breath or having chest discomfort sit down on the steps or landings. Continue only when your symptoms go away.



REST

Rest is an important part of your recovery as it helps to heal your heart. Building in time for rest should be part of your everyday routine. A rest period can be 20 minutes or longer, depending on how you feel. How and when you do it is up to you.

Rest does not mean you have to go to bed or that you have to go to sleep.

Rest is best taken uninterrupted in a comfortable position (lying or sitting) in a quiet room with some pleasant music (if desired). Some suggestions for rest during the next six weeks include:

- ♥ rest after each meal, including breakfast, for 15 – 30 minutes
- ♥ rest before and after your daily exercise
- ♥ rest when you feel tired
- ♥ rest before any organized activity – e.g., party, out for supper, movie
- rest whenever you begin to feel tired, short of breath, dizzy or light-headed

You should also tell your family and friends when you are tired so you can rest.

DRIVING

It is important that you talk to your doctor about when you can start driving. In Alberta the average time that a person is not to drive after a heart attack is about 4 weeks. The regulations regarding this time period vary between provinces. When you can drive depends on the condition of your heart and any complications that you may have had with your heart attack.

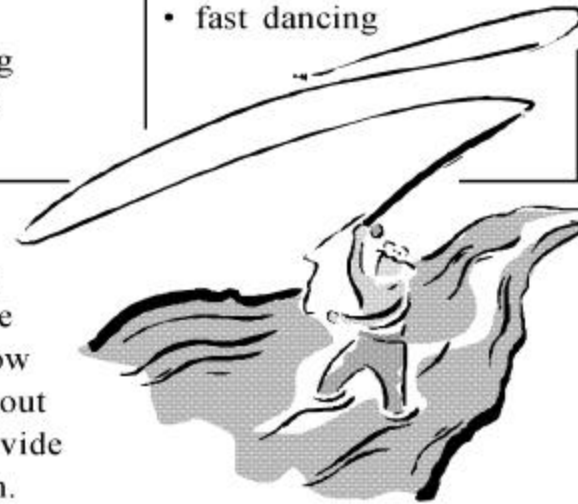
It is recommended that you check with your Car Insurance company to find out if there are any other restrictions on your driving.

2 STARTING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM IN THE FIRST 6 WEEKS

Over the next six weeks you will want to gradually work into an exercise program. Where you start and how you progress will depend on your level of fitness prior to your heart attack. Your goal should be to start with a light form of exercise and gradually work into a moderate type. You should talk to your cardiologist about starting OR resuming any form of vigorous exercise in the first six weeks following your heart attack. Here are some examples of light, moderate, vigorous types of exercises.

Light Exercise	Moderate Exercise	Vigorous Exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Light walking (level ground)• Stationary bike (no tension)• Treadmill (no elevation)• Fishing• 5-pin bowling• yoga	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• brisk walking• golfing• cycling• stationary bike (with tension)• swimming• skating• horseback riding• 10-pin bowling• dancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• jogging• cross-country skiing• hockey• aerobics• racket sports• basketball• fast dancing

“Walking” is the recommended exercise for people recovering from a heart attack. A successful walking program begins slowly with gradual increase in time (how long), intensity (how hard), and distance (how far). It also allows you to walk at your own pace without overtiring yourself. The following guidelines will provide you with instructions on a walking exercise program.



TIPS for your walking program

- ♥ During the first week you are home try walking a short distance two or three times a week. Start out with 5, 10 or 15 minutes each time as tolerated. Gradually increase the distance and add a few minutes each successive week. Walk at your own pace and rest when you feel tired. Your goal should be to gradually increase your walking to 30 - 45 minutes three to five times a week. (This time should include a warm-up and cool-down period.)
- ♥ “Warm-up” for 5 - 10 minutes by walking at a slow, easy pace. This allows the blood vessels to open up and supply more blood to the heart and legs in preparation for exercise. It also helps the blood pressure and heart rate to gradually increase.
- ♥ At the end of your exercise, “cool-down” for at least five minutes. Cool down by walking slower at an easy and comfortable pace. This will allow your heart rate and blood pressure to decrease gradually.

- ♥ If your exercise starts to feel hard, decrease your speed, time and effort. Rate your effort according to how you feel - is your walking or cycling easy? hard? very hard?
- ♥ If you find it hard to increase your distance, stay at this distance for a week. Try again and increase the distance as you can tolerate. If you are still unable to increase your distance after this time, stay at your comfortable level until you feel you can increase it.
- ♥ You may find that you are able to walk very well on one day and not do as much on another day. This is normal. Your heart and body may be well rested one day and can do more than it can on another day. Take it one day at a time.
- ♥ Your walking program should not make you feel extremely tired, very short of breath, or cause angina. If this does happen you may be overdoing it. Decrease your distance and your speed. If you are still having difficulty talk to your doctor.

Carry your nitroglycerin at all times and use it as instructed.

To help you exercise safely:

- ♥ Wait for at least one hour after meals before walking or cycling.
- ♥ Do not take a hot shower/bath after exercising.
- ♥ Do not smoke, drink alcohol or beverages with caffeine for two hours before and after exercise. These things can increase the workload on the heart.
- ♥ Do not exercise when you feel sick (e.g., flu, cold, infection).



TIPS for Hot Weather	TIPS for Cold Weather
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid extreme temperatures or weather conditions; instead do your walking in shopping malls or other buildings with controlled temperature • Wear cool, loose clothing. Cotton is best. • Carry a water container and drink cool water to replace body fluids lost through sweat. • Slow your pace and decrease the distance you walk. • Pick a cool time of the day to walk – early morning, evening. • Wear a hat. Use sunscreen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress in layers of warm clothes • Wear a hat and mitts to save body heat • Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose to warm the air entering your lungs. (This helps to prevent angina.) • Go for your walk in the warmer part of the day (11 a.m. – 2 p.m.) • Wear comfortable boots with good traction • In extreme conditions do your walking in your local shopping mall (list of Calgary shopping malls included at back of this book)

Watch for warning signs! If you experience any of the following signs and symptoms **stop exercising and rest.** If symptoms persist, take your nitroglycerin as instructed and get help.

- ♥ pain or discomfort in chest or arm
- ♥ feeling of tightness, pressure or burning in chest, arms, jaw, neck
- ♥ shortness of breath or breathlessness
- ♥ light-headedness or feeling dizzy
- ♥ pounding heart (palpitations)

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU'RE OVERWORKING YOUR HEART DURING EXERCISE?

During your recovery process it is important not to overwork the heart. There are several ways to tell when you are working too hard:

- Listen to your body. You should **not** feel any chest discomfort, angina, muscle discomfort or feel very tired or breathless when you are doing your daily activities or exercising.
- Follow the “talk test”. You should be able to talk easily and comfortably without becoming short of breath. If you cannot do this, you are probably overworking the heart.

It is important to pay attention to how the exercise makes you feel. The **Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE)** scale is a way of measuring your level of activity. You should aim for the **10 to 12 RPE area.**

For example, if you are able to “sing” while exercising, you are not working hard enough. However, if you are unable to say more than 4 to 6 words at a time, you are working too hard and need to cut back on your pace. Exercising within a 10 to 12 RPE range means that you are able to talk comfortably in full sentences without any symptoms or shortness of breath. The 10 – 12 RPE range should be your goal while exercising.

RPE Scale	Talk Test
6	(resting)
7 very, very light	
8	
9 very light	(would be able to sing)
10	
11 fairly light	
12	(would be able to talk comfortably in full sentences)
13 somewhat hard	
14	(talking more than 4 to 6 words may be difficult)
15 hard	
16	(talking more than 2 to 3 words may be difficult)
17 very hard	
18	(talking 1 word may be difficult)
19 very, very hard	
20	(maximum effort)