Post-Operative Activities – Exercise, Cardiac Rehab, Return to Work & Driving

**Exercise:**
It is important to resume an active lifestyle by increasing your activity and aerobic exercise after cardiac surgery. We encourage you to listen to your body and increase your activity based on how you are feeling.

For example,
1. You can start off with increasing your activity and ambulation around your home
2. Walking down your driveway
3. Eventually walking down the street and around your neighborhood

Your exercise can be tailored based on your activity level prior to surgery. If at any time you feel that your exercise is too taxing or stressful on your body, we encourage you to rest. Always stop any activity that causes pain.

**Sternal Precautions** for patients that have recently had a sternotomy.
It takes 6-8 weeks for the sternum to heal. During this time, we want you to keep in mind your sternal precautions as you increase your activity and exercise. Protect your sternum and stay away from activities that will put tension on your sternum.

Example:
- Avoid pushing or pulling with one arm, use both arms and keep them close to the body when lifting objects, getting out of bed or standing up from a chair.
- Avoid pushing, pulling or lifting anything over 10 lbs
- Avoid raising your arms over your head and do not put your arms behind your back
- Avoid pushing up from the chair or bed
- Always brace your sternum with your heart pillow when coughing or changing positions.

**Cardiac Rehab:**
During your hospital stay, the cardiac rehab department will visit you to discuss post-operative rehab. Cardiac rehab is an outpatient program centered on cardiovascular exercise and education that is designed to help you improve your health and regain your strength and mobility after undergoing cardiac surgery. Cardiac rehab is typically a 3 month program but the duration of the program will tailored based on each patient’s needs.

We encourage our patients to seek cardiac rehab to promote a healthy lifestyle and optimal recovery. We emphasize the importance of acquiring the information and knowledge offered in cardiac rehab so that you can carry it with you as your return to normal daily life.

**Driving:**
Depending on your recovery status, your doctor will notify you when you may return to activities such as driving. Typically, for a patient that has had a sternotomy, this usually occurs about 4-6 weeks after surgery. Those undergoing minimally invasive surgery are able to return to driving much sooner. However; this will be based on each patient and the status of their recovery.

If you have a long drive planned, we encourage frequent stops (for about 5-10 minutes every hour) to get out of the car and walk as this prevent blood clots from forming.

**Return to Work:**
Just as with driving, your return to work will be based on how well you are recovering and what your job duty entails. Usually, patients will be able to return to work about 6-8 weeks after surgery, possibly sooner if you have had a minimally invasive surgery. If you have the flexibility at work, try to ease back into your work routine. Starting back half-time and gradually increasing back to a normal schedule as you are able

**In Conclusion:**
Please know that if you have any questions or concerns, we are here for you.

You can contact our office by calling 713-486-5100 or send us an email at: info.ctvs@uth.tmc.edu