

After Heart Surgery

Average Duration of Hospitalization Stay: The average post-operative hospitalization ranges between 3-7 days. This is adjusted based on the patient's response to surgery and their convalescence. A patient will not be discharged from the hospital until all and every post-operative issue has been addressed.

Post Operative Discharge Plans: The patient will be discharged either home or to an extended care facility, should the patient's needs exceed the support available by family members. If the patient is being discharged home, it is imperative that there is enough family member support to provide 24 hour continuous care for the first week or so post-operatively. If that is not possible, please bring this to the attention of our case managers and social workers as soon as possible, so that alternative plans can be implemented without delaying the patient's discharge.

How Do I Care for My Incisions?

Types of Incisions

Traditional: If the breastbone is separated during surgery, strong sternal wires are used to close it. The chest is then closed with special internal or traditional external stitches.

Minimally Invasive: In a minimally invasive technique, smaller incisions are made that may or may not go through the sternum.

Other incisions may be present after surgery, from chest tubes, pacemaker wires or intravenous (IV) sites.

It is imperative that you keep your incisions clean. Starting on the 6th day after surgery, you may shower. Use a liquid soap without perfume or lotion (for example, Dial or Ivory). Do not use bar soap. To avoid dizziness, do not use very hot water.

- If you are washing your hair, do that first.
- At the end of your shower, clean your incisions.
- Gently pat each incision with a CLEAN soapy washcloth.
- **DO NOT RUB!!!!**
- Rinse the incision thoroughly using a gentle shower stream.
- After your shower, pat your incision dry with a **CLEAN** dry towel.

- Have someone nearby the first time you shower. If you feel weak, use a rubber-footed chair or stool to sit on in the shower.
- If you are unable to get into a shower, you may wash at the sink with running water and a clean, soapy washcloth. Rinse with clean washcloth. Remember to use liquid soap.
- If you are sent home with staples or stitches we will make plans for you to have them taken out.

Preventing Infection:

- AVOID touching your incisions as much as possible.
- Wear clean clothes next to your incisions.
- Keep pets away from your incisions.
- If you have drainage, it is OK to replace with a new gauze pad. Secure with tape. Change it every day.
- Care for your incisions only as instructed.

Call us if you have any signs of infection: redness, puss, yellow drainage, odor, increased warmth, fever, or tenderness. 817-465-5311

What Activities Can I DO/ NOT DO?

DO

- Gradually increase your activity each day. Walking several times in the morning and afternoon will help build your strength. It will also help prevent depression.
- Dr. Bradford will tell you when is ok to return to work.
- Cardiac Rehabilitation is encouraged around 6 weeks after bypass or valve surgery. We will discuss this with you and provide information regarding programs near you.
- You may resume sexual intercourse in 4-6 weeks.
- You may go up and down stairs 1-2 times a day the first week after discharge. Increase as tolerated after one week, but pace yourself.

DON'T

- **DO NOT** sit for long amounts of time (no more than 2 hours)
- **DO NOT** drive (this includes riding mowers, tractors, and golf carts) until you are cleared by Dr. Bradford.
- **DO NOT** lift anything heavier than 10 pounds (a gallon jug of milk) until seen by Dr. Bradford for your follow-up appointment.
- **DO NOT** operate heavy machinery or power tools for 6 weeks (e.g. drills, saws, etc.).

How Do I Protect My Breastbone While It Is Healing?

During open heart surgery the sternum (breast bone) is cut in half, and then wires are placed in the sternum to hold it together. Any movement that increases friction at the incision site may delay healing and increase the risk of infection. It takes 4-6 weeks for proper healing (up to 8 weeks if you are diabetic).

DO

- When getting out of bed, hug a pillow and roll onto your side using your legs for assistance. Gently push up with your shoulder and elbow to sit up as you kick your legs off the edge of the bed.
- When standing up, hug a pillow or place your hands on your knees, lean forward, and push up with your legs. **DO NOT** let someone pull on or under your arms—have them place their hands on your hips or backside to help with standing.
- Always use both arms to lift objects (no more than 10 lbs), and keep the object close to your body when moving it.
- Continue bathing, dressing, and grooming activities as usual.
- Female patients—wear a front-closing bra or hook the bra in the front and slide it behind you to avoid stretching both arms behind you.

DON'T

- **DO NOT** push or pull with your arms to change position in bed, to get up from sitting, or to get out of a car. This also includes not pulling on stair railings.

- DO NOT stretch both arms behind your back (i.e. putting on a coat)
- DO NOT lift more than 10 lbs or allow infants or pets to lie on your chest.

What Kind of Diet Do I Follow?

- Replace saturated fats (margarine, butter, shortening) with unsaturated fats (olive oil, canola oil, avocado).
- Eat 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Eat 6 servings of whole grain products each day.
- Eat 2 servings of fish each week.
- Low Sodium (2,300 mg/day). Do NOT add salt to your food.
- Avoid foods high in trans-fat (also called partially hydrogenated fat.)
- Avoid fried foods and high-fat baked goods.

Other Things I Need To Do or Know

Anti-Embolism stockings (TED hose) are special support stockings which we will give you to wear. Wear them for at least 2 weeks after you return home. Take them off twice a day for about 30 minutes.

To protect your breastbone, you will need assistance taking the hose on and off. We will give you an extra pair to take home with you. Put on a clean pair each day. You may wash them in the sink. Hang them to dry.

- Weigh yourself every morning and keep a record. Wear similar clothing and urinate before weighing. Call your doctor if you gain 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week.
- DO NOT SMOKE or USE TOBACCO PRODUCTS!!!
- Mood swings are common after heart surgery. Some people feel very good and then very bad or sad and cry easily. If this is a problem for you, talk to your family doctor.
- Prevent constipation by including plenty of fiber in your diet. Good sources include fresh fruits, vegetables, dried beans and whole grains. It is also important that you drink six to eight cups of non-caffeinated fluids per day to help prevent constipation.

When Should I Call My Surgeon?

- Redness, tenderness, drainage, pus from the incision
- Fever > 100 for more than 24 hours
- Increase of weight by 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week
- Increased shortness of breath
- Heartbeat that feels too fast, too slow, or skips
- Feeling weaker instead of stronger
- Aches, chills, decreased appetite
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Bruising, blood in urine or stool, bleeding gums

Office Hours

Monday- Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

817-465-5311

www.bradfordmd.com