

Know Your Limits

and Stretch Them

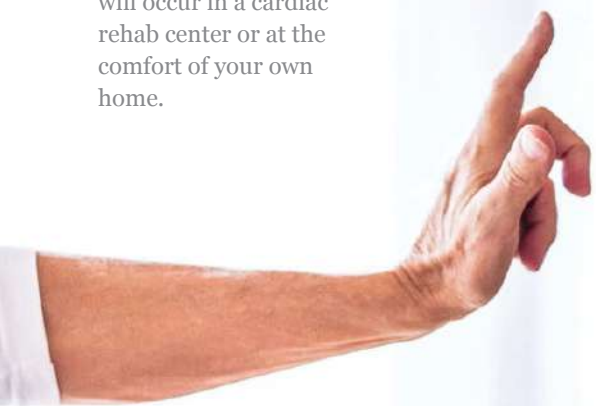
You open your groggy eyes and you start to wonder if you are in heaven or in a dream. Then things start to clear up, you are in the ICU after a heart surgery. Your body is aching, everything feels heavy. Sometimes breathing seems like such a chore.

However all is not lost, a cardiac rehabilitation team of nurses, a dietitian, and a physiotherapist will be at your side to help and guide you the way back to a healthy lifestyle. Simple things you may take for granted, like how to get out of bed especially after an open heart surgery. Posture and leverage are key to ensure you do not stretch your sternum or sprain your spine. These healthcare professionals will work together towards a main goal which is to improve your functional mobility, decrease risk factors, help your family manage the psychosocial effects that may influence your recovery.



From a heart fitness point of view, physiotherapy is crucial in post surgery recovery. After all, the heart is made up of muscles. In post-op your physiotherapist will evaluate your cardiac function, assesses any impairments that may restrict your mobility, as well as prescribe exercise routines and physical activities tailored to you to help you return to your normal lifestyle.

There are four phases of cardiac rehabilitation. The first phase occurs in the hospital itself after post-op, while phases two, three and four will occur in a cardiac rehab center or at the comfort of your own home.



PHASE ONE
1 - 2 WEEKS

THE ACUTE PHASE

First and foremost, the physiotherapist will assess your mobility and how basic body functions affect your cardiovascular system. Based on your capability, your physiotherapist will prescribe you simple exercises to strengthen your heart and lungs, and increase mobility with emphasis on safety. You will also be given walking aids if needed, to ensure you are able to move around safely. Once you are clear to go home, you will be discharged and ready to begin phase two of the cardiac rehab program.

PHASE TWO
3 - 8 WEEKS

THE SUBACUTE PHASE

The second phase usually starts two weeks after you are discharged from the hospital. Your heart response to exercise and physical activity will be monitored closely. In this phase, your physiotherapist will guide you on proper exercise procedures as well as how to self-monitor your heart rate, and exertion levels during an exercise. The goal of phase two is to move you towards a more intense and independent physical activity.

PHASE THREE
2 - 6 MONTHS

INTENSIVE OUTPATIENT

Phase three can vary from eight weeks to six months which involves a more independent exercise. At this stage, you should be able to monitor your own heart rate, your symptomatic response, and your ratings of perceived exertion (RPE), based on the **Borg scale**, during exercise. So if you are used to cycling prior to your cardiac event, your physiotherapist will advise you to keep your heart rate within a safe range and slowly increase your intensity over time.

PHASE FOUR
6 MONTHS - 1 YEAR

INDEPENDENT MAINTENANCE

And the final phase which is roughly six months to a year after your operation, you have finally graduated! You're now fully responsible for your own heart maintenance and conditioning. By now you should have excellent knowledge about your specific heart condition, risk factors, and good strategies for optimal healthy living goals. It is essential that you continue to strengthen your heart to prevent possible future cardiac problems. Although it is called an independent maintenance phase, your physiotherapist is just an appointment away if you need extra help!