

Activities of Daily Living After Heart Surgery

Self-care for safety and healing

This handout gives important guidelines to help your healing and keep you safe after heart surgery. It includes recommendations for safety when completing activities of daily living (ADL) such as putting on clothes and taking a shower.

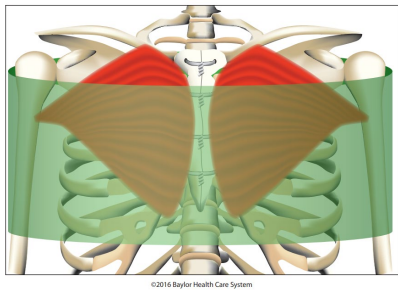
Activity Recommendations

“Keep Your Move in the Tube” is a phrase to help you use your arms and minimize the stress on your sternum (breastbone) while it heals after surgery.

The goal is to **keep your upper arms close to your body** with load bearing movements. You can move your arms outside of the tube with non-load bearing movements. Your therapists will help you modify activities specific to you. Pictures of common activities such as getting out of the bed, standing up from a chair, and reaching overhead are below.

When performing tasks that require lifting, pushing, and pulling, use both arms together and keep them **“in the tube”**.

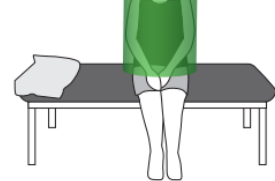
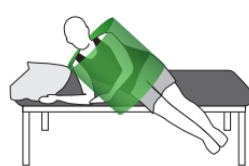
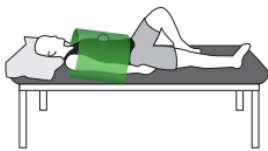
There are no weightlifting restrictions. You should ease into these activities. Listen to your body. Pain is a signal to stop or change the activity. We do not expect a sudden, sharp increase in pain. We do expect soreness.



The “tube” is the area around your upper arms, sternum, and the attached muscles.

Daily Activities “In the Tube”

Getting In and Out of Bed While Staying “In the Tube”



Notice that the upper arms stay close to the body in all movements, and both arms are being used.

- Bend your knees and roll onto your side.
- Move your feet off the bed. Pull your feet against the edge of the bed.
- Use **both of your arms** to push up into sitting. Keep your upper arms close to your body.
- Sit for a few minutes before you stand up.

Standing up from a bed, chair, or toilet

“In the Tube”



“Out of the Tube”



- Scoot to the edge of the surface you are sitting on.
- Keep **both of your arms at your sides** and them to help support yourself when standing up. Keep your upper arms close to your body when pushing.
- When sitting down, avoid reaching behind to lower yourself into a chair.

Toileting

- When reaching behind your back for hygiene and/or pulling up pants, reach back with one arm at a time. Keep your upper arm close to your body for comfort.
- A bidet is another option for cleaning yourself more thoroughly.
- Your OT (occupational therapist) may recommend the use of a toilet aid and will show you how to use it.

Bathing

- You can move your arms freely to reach your upper and lower body when showering. When showering/drying, reach behind your back one arm at a time for comfort.
- Do not take a bath or soak until your provider says it is OK. This includes swimming or sitting in a hot tub or sauna.
- Consider using a shower chair to help save your energy and prevent falls.
- Wash your incision gently with a mild, unscented soap daily. Do not scrub your wound.
- Do **not** apply creams, ointments, lotions, or powders to your incision.
- Your OT may recommend the use of a handheld shower hose, non-slip bathmat, or a long-handled sponge/brush.

Dressing

- You can wear any style of shirt that feels comfortable. When putting on a t-shirt, button-down shirt, or jacket, keep your upper arm close to your body when reaching behind your back for comfort.
- Sit down when getting dressed to save energy and reduce your risk of falling.
- Your OT may recommend long-handled adaptive equipment such as reachers, sock aids, or long shoehorns. Elastic laces may also make dressing easier.

Surgical bras/Chest Supports

- Your team may recommend you wear a surgical bra/chest support after your surgery. These types of support can help your wound heal by preventing the downward or sideways pull of your chest on the incision.
- Underwire bras are not recommended as they can put pressure on your wound.

Other Activities

The following are guidelines for completing tasks such as grocery shopping, housework, cleaning, chores, yard work, childcare, leisure/hobbies etc.

- When reaching overhead to retrieve items from a cabinet, high shelf, or closet; **use both arms** and keep your arms close to your body.

“In the Tube”:



“Out of the Tube”:



- When holding, carrying, or transporting items, **use both hands** to hold the item and keep your arms close to your body.

“In the Tube”



“Out of the Tube”:



- When reaching to push or pull an object, such as opening a door, **use both hands** and keep your arm close to your body.

“In the Tube”



“Out of the Tube”:



- Do **not** drive any vehicles or operate power tools until your provider gives you permission. On long drives, stop every hour to get out and take a brief walk.

Sexual Activity

- You may resume sexual activity as desired. Use pacing strategies to avoid over-exerting yourself. Use “move in the tube” guidelines with positioning.

Energy Conservation

- Build in rests between tiring activities. For example, take a shower in the morning and schedule appointments in the afternoon.
- Think of your energy like a charge on your cell phone. You have only so much to use before you need to charge it. If you use too much of your charge at once, you will need to stop and “plug in” during the day. Pace yourself.
- You may have good days and more challenging days. Give yourself permission to ask for help.
- After major surgery it is normal to feel tired, frustrated, or even depressed. Some people cannot think as clearly as usual. Talk with your care provider if these issues do not go away.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Occupational Therapy:
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