A heart attack is death of part of the heart muscle. That part of the heart muscle turns into a scar. It takes about 6 weeks for the scar to be strong.

Guidelines

These guidelines can help your recovery. Your nurse or doctor will give you instructions that are important for you to follow.

1. To help you have fewer problems with your heart, you should follow healthy heart steps. Ask your nurse or doctor for a copy of Healthy Heart instructions.

2. Follow your diet. It should be
   a. Low in cholesterol and saturated fat, which helps to reduce heart disease risk,
   b. Low in sodium (salt), which helps to reduce fluid retention,
   c. High in fiber and bulk, which helps with bowel movements.
   d. Your nurse or doctor will give you a copy of your diet.

3. Keep your weight under control.
   a. Extra weight causes your heart to work harder.
   b. If you are overweight, your nurse or doctor can help you with a weight loss plan.

4. Regular exercise is an important part of your recovery.
   a. Until your first visit to the doctor, 5 minutes of slow walking once or twice a day may be all that is allowed. Your doctor will tell you about your activity plan.
   b. Always begin exercise with a warm-up: 5 minutes of slow walking and stretching.
   c. Exercise at your target heart rate. Your target heart rate is how fast your heart should beat during exercise.
      • Count your pulse during the exercise.
      • Your nurse or doctor will tell you what your heart rate should be.
      • Your activity will increase as you recover.
   d. After exercise, cool down by slow walking for at least 5 minutes. End with stretching.
   e. Stop and rest for 15 to 30 minutes if you feel tired.
   f. Avoid activity in very hot or very cold temperatures.
   g. Stop if you experience chest pressure, tightness, pain in the chest, shortness of breath, or dizziness.

5. Plan for rest and relaxation.
   a. Try to sleep 6 to 8 hours every night.
   b. Rest or take naps during the day.
   c. Space your activities. Do not push yourself.
   d. Make time for fun and recreation.
   e. Learn to feel relaxed. Worry and stress increase your heart rate and blood pressure.
   f. Your nurse or doctor can help with ways to relax.

6. Sex after a heart attack.
   a. Sexual relations usually are allowed by your doctor about 3 to 4 weeks after the heart attack.
   b. You can show affection and caring by touching, holding, and caressing. These activities use little energy, so you can use them as soon as you are home.
   c. Avoid sexual relations when you
      • Are tired and feeling stressed,
      • Have just eaten a large meal (wait about 2 hours),
      • Are in a very hot or very cold area.
   d. If you feel your medication is making you feel ill, notify your doctor before stopping it.

7. Take your medications as instructed.
   a. Do not skip or stop taking any medication without first checking with your doctor.
   b. Keep a list of the name, the dose, how you should take it, the reason you are taking it, and the side effects for each medication.
   c. If you have diabetes, be sure to monitor blood glucose levels as part of your exercise plan. Always plan to carry a source of sugar (such as hard candy) when exercising.

8. Do not smoke.
   a. Smoking makes the heart beat faster and raises the blood pressure.
   b. Many groups have classes to help stop smoking. Your nurse or doctor can give you more information.
   c. Ask your doctor about medications to help you stop smoking.

9. Avoid straining and holding your breath while doing activities.
   a. Do not strain during bowel movements. If you have trouble with constipation, call your nurse or doctor.
After Your Heart Attack

b. Do not lift heavy objects, especially above your head or when bending at the waist.
c. Refrain from vacuuming or carrying heavy objects for the first 4 to 6 weeks.

10. Life after a heart attack
   a. Set goals you can reach at home and at work.
   b. Talk out your feelings with your family.
   c. Tell your nurse or doctor about your home and work demands.
   d. Call the American Heart Association for the name of the self-help group that meets in your area. This is a group of people who have recovered from a heart attack. They help others recovering from heart attacks.
   e. Have regular check-ups with your doctor.
   f. Your nurse or doctor can discuss your personal risk factors for heart disease and how to change them.

11. Know the signs of a heart attack:
   a. Pressure, fullness, tightness, or pain in the center of the chest for more than 2 minutes
   b. Pain that spreads to the neck, jaw, shoulders, or arms
   c. Shortness of breath
   d. Nausea or vomiting
   e. Fainting, dizziness, or weakness
   f. Sweating
   g. Your signs may be mild. They may go away and then return. If you have diabetes, you may not experience chest pain because of nerve changes.

12. If you have these signs, act immediately.
   a. Call the emergency service number.
   b. Never drive yourself to the hospital.
      • Call an ambulance.
      • If the ambulance cannot come immediately, you may need to have someone drive you.
   c. Talk to your nurse or doctor about your emergency plan.

OTHER INSTRUCTIONS