

what's the recovery time line after open heart surgery?

 physicallyempowered.com/blog/heart-bypass-surgery-recovery-time/

TheWellnessPhysio

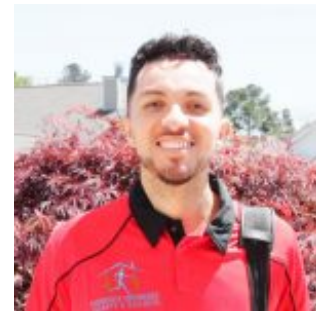
Info Hub...



written by

TheWellnessPhysio

Updated January 30, 2019



Are you wondering why you still get tightness in your chest?

Or why you still swell sometimes?

Well if you've had your heart surgery or still considering it at this point... then this article is for you.

After your surgery you will probably be given recovery advice while still at the hospital.

Of course you most likely won't remember anything they've told you.

Going home after your operation is definitely a big relief, but it can also be a daunting experience. Don't worry you're not alone it's definitely a normal feeling so hopefully I can calm your nerves down with my next statement.....

There is no definite recovery timeline after you've had open heart surgery.

WHY?

Well it's because recovery is a subjective experience, that only you'll go through.

Everyone's recovery will be different.

Take for example you and I.

It may take me longer to tidy up the house compared to you. Or, to cook a meal or how much weight we can separately lift. My point is that many factors affect how long your recovery may last after heart surgery.

KEY FACT #1

The most common open heart surgical procedure is a Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (also known as CABG).

What Is A Coronary Artery Bypass Graft?

As you probably already know it's your coronary arteries that supply blood and oxygen to your heart muscle. If you're reading this then you probably have been diagnosed or know someone with coronary artery disease. What happens here is that the arteries start get more narrow, due to things like smoking, cholesterol levels, and your diet which cause blockages.

This makes it harder for the blood to reach the heart and provide it with the oxygen it needs.

Imagine you are in your car, cruising along the highway. All of a sudden you've hit traffic, and it's going to take much longer to reach your destination. Now picture this traffic jam turns into a gridlock and there is no detour route. You are definitely not making it to your destination at all now.

This is a simple way to think about why you get that frightening chest pain (also known as angina) that you have to pull out your "*Nitro*" spray for. The blood and oxygen is not making it to your heart.

But to be honest, the worst really is a heart attack, which can happen as the heart muscle becomes starved of oxygen.

So in saying that the purpose of the coronary artery bypass graft is to better the flow of blood to the heart muscle. Your surgeon will take a healthy vein or artery (graft) from your body and use it to get around (bypass) the part of the coronary artery which is narrowed.

Improving the blood flow back to your heart.

KEY FACT #2

Getting bypass surgery *DOES NOT* cure your coronary artery disease. You can still get new blockages if you do not change your lifestyle which caused it to begin with.

factors that will affect your recovery time:

- Your Age and Sex
- If you are having any other surgery along with a bypass
- Whether you have other conditions such as lung problems, kidney failure, or diabetes
- Whether you were a smoker prior to surgery
- How urgent was the bypass surgery necessary for your health and well being
- Your weight prior to having the surgery

The following complications during surgery also affect your recovery timeline...

- 1

Infection: your wounds can become infected including your chest (since it's open heart), leg or arm depending from where the graft is taken from. It's also possible to get a lung infection after surgery due to the anesthesia during the surgery.

- 2

Heart Attack: although rare it is possible to suffer a heart attack during the surgery. This happens for the same reason you are having the surgery in the first place. The heart muscle is not getting blood flow.

- 3

Bleeding: excessive bleeding could cause you a longer stay in hospital slowing down the start of recovery.

- 4

Stroke: while in surgery a clot could form or become dislodged traveling towards the brain and causing a stroke. This can be temporary or permanent.

- 5

Pain: it's normal to feel pain for weeks after your operation and everyone handles pain differently. You will be supplied with pain medications to help alleviate pain and begin the healing process.

- 6

Kidney problems: bypass surgery can have an affect to your kidneys. However, you'll usually recover within a few days.

So What Happens Once I'm Discharged Home?

At this point now you'll probably be happy to be home and out of hospital... in your own comfortable surroundings.

But with this...

Come the alarming feelings of being overwhelmed and stuck.

At the hospital you felt safe...it wasn't as terrifying as it is now that your home, alone without the nurse staff nearby.

The first thing you need to understand...is that your chest bones (sternum) have been cut apart. This was necessary for the surgeon to be able to work on your heart (hence it's called open heart surgery).

Don't make the mistake of slowing down your healing process by using your arms more than you should after surgery.

It's going to take **up-to 8-weeks** for your sternum to heal after bypass surgery.

So you need to be cautious about using your arms for anything you may do once you are at home.

Pushing and pulling must be avoided to limit separation of your sternum.

This means no lifting any heavy items nor carrying any children.

A good measuring stick....anything heavier than a half pot of water is a **NO-GO!**

Open heart surgery, for this reason has a slower recovery time.

Your surgeon wants to reduce any separation of the wound site, and this is why most cardiac rehab programs don't start for 6-8 weeks after surgery.

This way of thinking is so cringe-worthy to me.

It makes me want to scream when I first meet a patient whose had bypass surgery and they say they were told to wait 8-weeks to do anything.

Just because you have restrictions with lifting or resistance exercise due to your chest wound...shouldn't mean that you can't work on your aerobic fitness.

Of course you can!

You most definitely should be doing some form of aerobic exercise or a physical activity which forces you to get moving.

Heck just getting out of bed or getting dressed is a form of physical activity.

The best thing you can be doing once you get home is walking!

Walking short distances around your home or outside if you're able to.

Walking is a great form of aerobic exercise and the best thing is it's FREE!

If you're wondering whether it's too early to start cardiac rehab...

It's NOT but only if you know which exercises to do and which to avoid.

Lets talk Now!Click here ->>>

Emotional reaction:

When you first come home you're going to feel physically and emotionally tired.

Don't be surprised if you find yourself being mean and nasty to friends or family.

During the first couple of weeks it's normal for you to go through changes in your mood...

And this is because bypass surgery is an overwhelming experience.

You were just at a point in life, where there was a chance that you possibly couldn't have made it without open heart surgery.

These are all normal feelings you will be experiencing.

Which makes even more sense to get going early with a walking program when you get home.

So that you aren't just sitting around trying to cope with your thoughts.

Plus exercise has been proven to help reduce anxiety and feelings of depression.

Wound Care:

Taking care of that surgical scar on your chest after surgery is an important part of your recovery.

Every day you should be having a look at your wound site to make sure it's healing well and there are no signs of infection.

If your bandages and dressings have been removed then make sure you clean the area when you shower thoroughly.

However, you need to avoid scented creams, soaps, and powders, because it will definitely irritate your wound site.

Most importantly, make sure your hands are clean whenever you touch your wound area, the last thing you want is to get an infection and slow down your recovery.

Shortness of breath:

Now you'll probably think....

"I get so frustrated...I have to sit down when I'm standing too long. I thought I wouldn't be breathless anymore after surgery. Why am I not fixed?"

Well the truth is it's quite normal to feel rather "puffed", especially when doing something which forces you to exert yourself.

Whether you struggled with your weight or not before having surgery, it's normal to feel unfit afterwards.

You may even put on a bit of weight during the recovery if your activity levels remain low.

This will make that shortness of breath even worse if you don't have the tolerance to get up and about.

Be aware that you may also feel short of breath due to phlegm (secretions) in your chest.

Your body will want to clear this gunk out your chest so you will be coughing up a lot.

This happens after surgery normally because of the anesthesia used.

In saying all of this...the hardest part is stepping through your front door. once you do that, you're going to want to continue!

About the author

TheWellnessPhysio

I'm Jeancarlo Alencastro, and I'm on a mission to help you feel better, stay active and have a better quality of life. For 10 years in the U.K. and the USA, I've helped young athletes and older adults remain active members of their community. I founded **Physically Empowered: Therapy & Wellness**, in order to focus on providing value every minute of every session, so that it would carry over when I'm not there. As an Athletic Trainer and Physiotherapist, my role is to simplify everything that's important to know in this over-complicated and overwhelming health and wellness world. If you want work together or have questions lets **Arrange To Speak**.

TheWellnessPhysio

Info Hub...

© 2018 Physically Empowered: Therapy & Wellness. All Rights Reserved. | [Terms & Conditions](#)