

## Caring for Yourself at Home



There are many factors that can affect your recovery, these include your condition before surgery, your strength, and determination. Remember that the home phase of your recovery is just as important as the hospital phase.

Please call us if you have any questions or concerns at:  
**PCCVS 24-hour Phone Number: (650) 366-0225**

## Call Your Doctor Immediately if You Experience Any of the Following

- Fever over 101° F or shaking chills.
- Leg or chest incisions that separate, become red or tender, or begin to drain.
- Severe incision pain, chest pain (angina), or difficulty breathing.
- Fast or irregular heartbeat.
- Bleeding or easy bruising.
- Increased swelling (edema) in the legs or weight gain greater than 3 pounds overnight.
- Other symptoms as explained by your doctor.

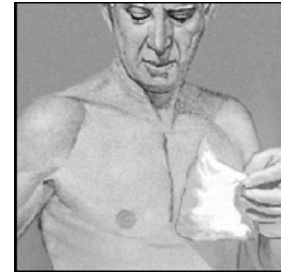
## Activity at Home

- **To protect your sternum (breastbone):** carry objects close to your body with your elbows firmly at your side, do not lift anything that causes chest discomfort or is heavier than 30-40 lbs. *for 6-8 weeks after your surgery.*
- Women should wear a supportive bra for 6-8 weeks.
- Continue to use a pillow or other chest support device, as instructed in the hospital, for up to 6-8 weeks.
- Do not drive for at least 3-4 weeks after surgery or until your doctor tells you to do so.
- You may sit in the front or back seat of the car and should wear a seat belt. **Do not disable the airbags; less protection is worse overall.**
- Follow the home walking program you received from our physical therapists. Gradually increase your activity at home, as you are able.
- Everyone recovers at a different rate. Please check with your doctor about when to return to work and resume your usual activities.



## Caring for Your Incisions

- Wash your incisions every day with a mild soap and water, gently pat dry. Do not scrub hard or rub across the incision.
- Do not use any creams, lotions or powders on your incisions.
- Elevate your legs when sitting to minimize swelling.
- If leg swelling is a problem, place pillows under the foot of your mattress to elevate your legs while sleeping.
- Wear elastic stockings for 1 month or as directed by your doctor. Remove these stockings for sleeping and bathing.
- A plumpness at the top of your chest incision is normal and will go away within a couple of months.
- A clicking or rubbing feeling in the breast bone once in a while is normal, especially in the first week after surgery. If you feel this, decrease your upper body activity. This feeling should go away within 2-3 weeks. If it lasts beyond a couple of weeks or is frequent, call your surgeon.
- Your incisions may feel numb to the touch. This numbness will go away in time.



## Tips on Bathing

- You may shower as soon as you feel able.
- Do not take tub baths or use hot tubs/spas for the first week after you are home.
- Use ONLY plain soap without perfume, and do not use any creams, lotions, or powders on your incisions.
- Use lukewarm water; avoid very hot or very cold water soon after surgery.
- Be ready to sit down or get help if you feel weak or dizzy.
- Arrange to have a family member or caregiver stand close by and assist you as needed .
- A shower chair may be helpful to prevent you from getting too tired while standing in the shower.



## Sleeping

- It is normal to feel more tired than usual. Plan to take rest periods or naps during the day until your strength returns.
- You can sleep in any comfortable position without hurting your incisions. Some patients prefer sleeping on a couch or in a lounge chair for a few days.
- Difficulty sleeping is common for a few days. Pain pills taken before bedtime may help you sleep.

## Your Diet at Home

- After you go home, there are no diet restrictions for the first 2 weeks, unless you have diabetes. Be sure to take in enough calories and nutrients for recovery.
- If you have diabetes, always follow your diabetic diet.
- After 2 weeks, follow the low cholesterol/low salt guidelines as directed by the dietitian. Too much salt can cause fluid gain and swelling.
- Eating a heart healthy diet will reduce the chance of forming new or recurring blockages in the coronary arteries.
- Take a multivitamin with minerals every day.
- Constipation is common. To prevent it:
  - Eat more fiber (fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains).
  - Drink enough fluids; about 6-8 cups per day, unless you are on a fluid restriction.
  - Take a laxative of your choice.

## Dental Care

- Good oral hygiene is important to your overall health.
- During certain dental treatments, bacteria can enter the bloodstream and cause infection of the heart valves and tissues.
- Antibiotics may be necessary prior to dental procedures for patients with abnormal heart valves, pacemakers, or within the first 6 months after heart surgery.
- Speak to your doctor about this prior to any dental work.



## More Ways to Learn

- **Ask About a Cardiac Rehabilitation Program:**  
Outpatient cardiac rehabilitation is a comprehensive program of exercise and education that helps people restore and maintain heart health. A team of cardiac specialists will partner with you and your doctor to develop an individualized plan of care to help you recover from surgery. With the guidance and support of cardiac rehab staff, participants gain strength and confidence to resume active lives. Cardiac Rehabilitation is located at 2360 Clay Street, in San Francisco. For more information or to enroll, they can be reached at: (415) 600-3361.
- **Visit the Community Health Resource Center:**  
The Community Health Resource offers classes, counseling and written information on a variety of health topics. CHRC is located at 2100 Webster Street, in San Francisco. They can be reached at: (415) 923-3155.
- **Visit the Institute for Health & Healing:**  
CPMC's Institute for Health and Healing is one of the largest integrative medicine centers in the nation with over 30 practitioners and doctors practicing more than 15 holistic therapies. It was created to support healing and healthier ways of living, both for individuals and communities, and provide access to advanced medical care with a patient-centered focus. IHH is located at 2040 Webster Street, near the corner of Sacramento Street, in San Francisco. They can be reached at: (415) 600-3681.
- **Visit these Web Sites:**  
American Heart Association [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
  
Society of Thoracic Surgeons [www.sts.org/patients](http://www.sts.org/patients)
  - Patient information on CABG and Heart Valve Repair or Replacement  
Mended Hearts [www.mendedhearts.org](http://www.mendedhearts.org)
  - Support group for patients who have undergone heart surgery  
CPMC's Learning About Your Health [www.cpmc.org/learning](http://www.cpmc.org/learning)

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Note: This information is not meant to replace any information or personal medical advice which you get directly from your doctor(s). If you have any questions about this information, such as the risks or benefits of the treatment listed, please ask your doctor(s).

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