

GEORGIA THORACIC & CARDIOVASCULAR SURGICAL ASSOCIATES

DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for entrusting us with your surgical care. Although you are been discharged from the hospital, it is expected that your convalescence will continue at home over the next several weeks as you slowly recuperate and regain your strength.

On average it takes about 10 – 12 weeks to recover fully after open heart surgery and about 6 – 8 weeks after major thoracic surgery. In addition to the hospital discharge booklet on exercise and diet, the following instructions will help you in understanding what to expect and how you can assist with the recovery process.

1. Call the office for postoperative follow up appointment at 678 904 5182 and also call your Cardiologist and Primary Care Physician to schedule appointments.
2. Keep your surgical incisions clean and dry for one week from the date of surgery, and clean daily with alcohol. You may shower subsequently and remove any steristrips from the incisions.
3. Watch for any signs of infection such as redness, swelling, yellowish or blood tinged drainage from the surgical incisions. Small serous drainage from the incisions or chest tube sites is not uncommon. Simply clean area with alcohol or hydrogen peroxide and apply sterile gauze.
4. Check and record your temperature daily for the first two weeks and call our office if greater than 101.5 on two consecutive readings. Check your Blood Pressure and Heart rate with an automated machine and call if BP lower than 90 systolic or heart rate lower than 50 on two consecutive readings.
5. Continue with breathing exercises by using your incentive spirometry for 10 minutes every 2 hours while awake for the first two weeks.
6. Walk around the house for the first few days and if the weather permits take daily walks around the yard and increase slowly the distance as tolerated. Take rest when needed and do not over exert yourself.
7. Do not lift weights heavier than 10 – 15 lbs. for the first 6 – 8 weeks as it takes the breast bone about 8 weeks to heal. You may notice some clicking or popping of the breast bone especially when coughing during this first 6 – 8 weeks.
8. You may notice swelling of the leg where the vein used for bypass was taken. Keep the leg elevated while sitting and continue with your support stockings for 2 – 3 weeks until swelling resolved.
9. You may drive short distances after 3 - 4 weeks if you feel up to it.

10. You may continue to experience numbness, aches and pains at the surgical sites and sometimes numbness and tingling of the fingers. These will usually resolve over 6 – 8 weeks. The pain medications should help in most instances during this period.

11. You may experience difficulties sleeping in bed at night for the first few weeks. Taking your pain pills at night might help with having a more comfortable sleep and some patients may find it easier sleeping on a recliner for the first 1 – 2 weeks.

12. Some patients especially the elderly may experience varying degrees of recent memory loss, which usually improves and returns to baseline within 8 – 12 weeks.

13. Appetite may be poor and fluctuate after surgery but should return to normal in most patients within 4 weeks.

14. Sexual activities may be resumed after two weeks when it is comfortable for you.

15. Take your medications as prescribed. Narcotic pain medications and Iron pills may cause constipation in some patients. Over the counter laxatives should help in most instances.

16. Secondary risk prevention and life style changes to obtain maximum benefit from the surgery will be discussed with you and loved ones during your office follow up visit.

17. If you have any problems or questions about your surgery, please call our office at 678 904 5182 Monday through Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. The Answering service will answer after hours. If you are experiencing severe chest pain or shortness of breath, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency room.

Once again, thank you for entrusting us with your care, and we look forward to seeing you at your post operative office visit.