

What to Expect After Heart Valve Surgery: A Patient's Recovery Pathway

The normal recovery time after a heart valve surgery is usually four to eight weeks, and may be shorter after minimally invasive surgeries. To help patients through the first weeks after treatment, why not look at our [Post-treatment Pathway & Milestones sheet](#). [\[hyperlink to pdf\]](#)

Below is some brief information about what to expect and prepare for before they go in for treatment.

Immediately after treatment

Immediately after surgery, people are usually practicing very basic self-care and are soon encouraged to get up, to breathe deeply, and to resume eating, drinking and walking.

Days and weeks following your treatment

During this phase, people can expect to gradually regain energy and return to their normal activity level. After about 3 weeks they should be able to walk for about 10 minutes a few times a day, and by week 6 they should comfortably be able to walk for 30 minutes.

Follow-up care

Patients will most likely be checked within four to six weeks following surgery for a postoperative visit. After that, it is critical to get regular check-ups by a heart specialist or your GP. Clarify with their healthcare provider what symptoms would warrant a phone call or an additional recheck. Whenever you have questions or concerns or if the patient experiences any unusual symptoms or changes in overall health, it never hurts to call and ask.

How can diet and exercise help in my recovery?

Two important parts of recovery and continuing health are a good diet and a regular exercise routine.

If their doctor has recommended a particular diet, it's important that they follow it. If a special diet has not been recommended, balanced, heart-healthy nutrition can speed healing and lessen fatigue. Weight control is also important for heart health; excess weight increases the work of the heart and slows recovery.

During recovery and beyond, make sure patients eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, breads, lean meats including fish and low-fat dairy products. Foods that are high in saturated fats, sugar, salt, and sodium should be limited. Processed meats should be avoided. In general, a low-fat, low-cholesterol, high-fibre diet is best. After a valve replacement, do not use supplemental calcium without approval from the healthcare provider.

Recovery Pathway

You should encourage patients to:

- Practice habits for emotional health
- Set positive goals
- Maintain realistic expectations
- Celebrate progress

Healthy Habits: Move Into A Routine

Exercise. One of the most reliable ways to keep their mood stable is to get moving. Exercise whenever the healthcare provider says you can. Many people find that keeping some sort of routine is very helpful for staying positive during recovery, too. Routines can include whatever keeps spirits up, provided they have your healthcare providers' okay.

Weigh themselves every day

You can expect a little weight loss for about three weeks. If they gain more than five pounds, tell their doctor. They may be retaining fluid, which can be dangerous.

Positive Goals: Plan Recovery

Often, before treatment, their mind will be anxious and pre-occupied with thoughts of the actual procedure. It is essential that you encourage them to look beyond this, and plan for their recovery pathway. You might like to arrange for a friend or family member who lives a distance away to come and see the patient 6 or 7 weeks after surgery. This will be an incentive, and something for them to look forward to post-treatment.

Manage Expectations and Celebrate Small Milestones

Learn the facts before they have your surgical procedure so that you'll know what to expect. The more they celebrate small victories each day, the more positive they will likely feel about their progress. Frustration is common for patients in the first two months of recovery, so help to remind them how well they are doing!