

Activity Guidelines after Your Organ Transplant

The purpose of this handout is to help you return to activities after surgery. You will gradually start to take care of yourself and walk while you are in the hospital. Activity makes your muscles stronger and improves how your heart and lungs work. You will know when to do more activities by checking how your body tolerates each activity.

Walking

After you go home, walk as much as you were doing before you left the hospital. Slowly increase the distance and speed or pace of your walking. You should walk every day.



Guidelines for walking include:

- Walk on level ground. If you must walk up hills, slow your speed.
- Plan where you will walk before you start. Consider the distance to get back so you do not get too tired.
- Walk after a rest period. Do not walk right after you eat or after vigorous activity.
- In the winter, walk in late morning or early afternoon when it is warmest. Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf. Avoid walking against the wind.

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Learn more about your health care.

- In the summer, walk during the coolest part of the day. Avoid walking when the humidity is high.
- In bad weather walk inside (home, office, hallways, shopping mall).

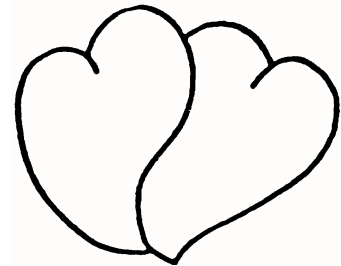
Pulse

- Take your pulse before and after you walk. You can expect your heart rate to go up with activity but it should go back to your resting rate 3 to 5 minutes after you stop walking.
- Signs that tell you that you are not ready for a certain level of activity are called **effort symptoms**. If you have one or more of these symptoms, stop and rest. These signs or symptoms are:
 - ▶ Shortness of breath (cannot talk while you are walking)
 - ▶ Profound fatigue or weakness
 - ▶ Heavy sweating
 - ▶ Dizziness



Sexual Activity

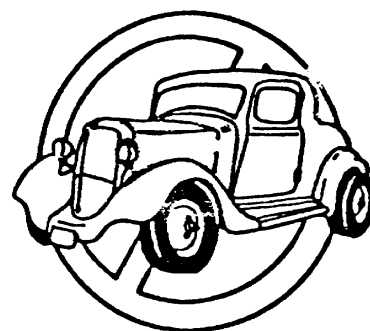
- You may have sex when you feel comfortable enough to do so. Women who did not have regular periods often begin to have periods within 6 months after surgery.
- Use birth control to prevent pregnancy. A woman can get pregnant even without menstrual periods. Women who want to have children following a transplant need to carefully consider the risks and discuss these with their transplant doctor and OB/GYN. Unplanned pregnancies are discouraged and can be dangerous. Talk about birth control methods with a gynecologist and the Post Transplant Office nurses or doctors. If you become pregnant, notify both your OB/GYN and doctor immediately.
- Women should get a PAP smear at least once a year. This is a routine check for cancer of the cervix. Women should also do a self-breast exam once a month.



- Men who have been impotent or unable to have an erection may regain sexual function after the transplant. If impotency persists 6 months after surgery, talk to the transplant doctors or nurses. They can help the man find out if the problem can be corrected.
- Prednisone can increase sperm counts. Men who have not been able to have children during their illness may now be able to do so. Talk about birth control methods if you do not want to have children.
- Men should do self-testicular exams and have a yearly physical examination.

Driving

No driving for at least 2 weeks after your transplant. Before you start driving, you must be off all narcotic pain medicines. You must also be able to turn your head to see the side mirrors and wear a seat belt with shoulder strap without feeling discomfort. You must also be able to apply pressure to the pedals quickly and without pain. When you begin to drive, start with short drives so that you do not get too tired.



Recreation

- When you return to recreational activities, remember **not to lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds for 6 weeks** after your surgery. After three months you can play sports except contact sports. Examples of contact sports are football, wrestling, hockey and boxing.
- If you want to play softball or baseball, you may want to put a protective pad over the transplant. These pads are available at sporting goods stores.



Homemaking

- When you are comfortable, you can gradually return to light household work. Dusting, washing dishes, cooking and sweeping are all light work.

- **Remember not to lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds for the first 6 weeks.** This means you may not be able to carry wet clothes or groceries. Only you know when you have done too much. If you feel yourself getting tired, or if you begin to have pain, you should stop and rest.
- **Wait until after the first 3 months to do heavy household chores like vacuuming and heavy garden work.**

Stair Climbing

- Climb one step at a time pausing a few seconds between each step.
- If effort symptoms develop, stop and rest where you are.
- Arrange your schedule so you are not frequently going up and down stairs. This activity requires your body to work harder.
- As your activity tolerance increases, you may climb stairs more frequently and at a faster pace.

Lifting

After the transplant operation your body needs 3 months to heal. **Do not lift anything that weighs more than 5 to 10 pounds for 6 weeks.** Also, for 3 months avoid movements or activities that put pressure on your chest such as using a shovel or pushing a mower.

- Get a firm footing by placing your feet a shoulder width apart.
- Bend at your knees, not at your waist.
- Lift with your leg muscles. Keep your back straight and avoid any twisting motion.
- Exhale as you lift. Do not hold your breath.
- Keep the load close to you to prevent back strain and the amount of work your arms have to do.
- Think before you lift. Get help if the load is too heavy or bulky for you to lift alone. Always push a load, do not pull.



Activities

| Activity | Time in Weeks after Discharge (unless noted) | Comment |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Walk inside the house | As soon as discharged | Walk 3 to 5 times a day for 5 minutes each time |
| Climb 1 flight of stairs | As soon as discharged | Pause between each step |
| Sit in yard | As soon as discharged | In comfortable weather |
| Walk in the yard | As soon as discharged | Leisurely walk 5 to 10 minutes |
| Mowing lawn, push | 12 | Seek doctor's advice |
| Water lawn | 2 | |
| Gardening | 4 to 6 | Light gardening after ground is broken |
| Make bed, cook, clean-up | 1 to 2 | Don't rush (see handout on Saving Energy and Making Work Simple) Make one side of the bed first then the other |
| Put out trash | 4 to 6 | Regular size bags, one at a time - should not be more than 5 to 10 pounds |
| Dust | 2 | |
| Vacuum | | Check at 6 week check up |
| Lift no more than 5 to 10 pounds | 6 | |
| Laundry | 3 to 4 | Do one load at a time. Ask for help to put wet clothes in dryer |
| Alcoholic drinks | | Talk with your doctor |
| Sexual relations | 2 to 6 | When you can climb 2 flights of stairs without symptoms |

Outside the Home Activities

| Activity | Time in Weeks after Discharge (unless noted) | Comment |
|---|--|--|
| Be driven in a car | As soon as discharged | Short distance when you are able to wear a seatbelt without discomfort |
| Walk around 2 blocks | 1 to 2 | Leisurely pace for 5 to 10 minutes |
| Walk dog | 1 to 2 | If dog doesn't pull on leash |
| Attend religious services | 5 to 7 days | Avoid people who show signs of illness |
| Attend movie or play | 2 | |
| Visit friends | 1 to 2 | Short drives or walks (1 to 2 hours) |
| Shopping | 2 to 3 | No carrying bags; short walking distances (10 minutes, rest 5 minutes, and repeat) |
| Grocery shopping | 3 to 4 | Carry no more than 5 pounds at a time |
| Restaurant dinner | 2 to 3 | Watch what you eat! Refer to food safety |
| Drive locally | 2 to 6 | Refer to driving instructions |
| Return to work | Depends on type of work | Consult your doctor |
| Drive to work | 6 | Consult your doctor |
| Overnight trips | 6 | Consult your doctor |
| Airline trips | | Consult your doctor |
| Longer trips (3 days or more) | 8 | |
| Attend recreational games | 6 | In comfortable weather - be aware of crowd and avoid anyone who is ill |
| Swimming or hot tubs | 10 | After incision is completely healed. Go in slowly; don't jump in |
| Golf <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with riding cart <li>• with pull cart | 6-8 12 | In comfortable weather - start with putting, chipping and then 9 holes |