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## Recovering from a heart attack

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### Summary

- Plan your recovery from a heart attack with your health professionals while you are in hospital.
  - Make sure you follow your plan when you leave hospital, take your medication and keep your appointments with doctors.
  - Most people are keen to get back to their normal lives, so ask your doctor when you can start everyday activities such as physical activity, travel, driving and work.
  - Speak with your doctor about attending cardiac rehabilitation to set a good foundation for healthy living with your heart condition.
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Plan your recovery from a heart attack with your treating healthcare professionals and heart specialists while you are in hospital. Ask for a My heart, my life handbook.

### Your hospital stay after a heart attack

A heart attack (myocardial infarction) occurs when one or more arteries supplying the heart with blood become partially or totally blocked. The area of the heart supplied by that artery then becomes permanently damaged.

Once you enter hospital, your doctors will decide what sort of treatment best suits your condition. The treatments you have will influence how you plan your recovery. For example, surgery will affect when you are able to do some things, such as driving or lifting heavier items.

Treatment after your heart attack will include long-term use of medication to lower the risk of further heart problems.

Other treatments after your heart attack may include:

- angioplasty and stent implantation – a procedure to open a blocked artery using a device called a stent that is left in place
- bypass surgery (coronary artery bypass graft surgery) – an operation in which blood vessels from other parts of your body are grafted to bypass the blocked arteries to your heart
- once your condition has stabilised, speak with your cardiac healthcare professionals about how and when you can go back to doing your everyday activities.

### Leaving hospital after a heart attack

When you leave hospital, make sure you have:

- supplies of your medication (and you know how and when to take it)
- an action plan in case you have a future medical emergency
- times for appointments with outpatient clinics, specialist doctors, your doctor and other healthcare professionals
- instructions on how to care for your wounds if you had surgery
- information about lifestyle changes you can make to reduce your risk of future heart events such as a heart attack
- a referral to a cardiac rehabilitation program.

Make sure you follow your plan when you leave hospital, take your medication and keep your appointments with doctors. Once you leave hospital:

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- visit your local doctor (GP) – take your medical test results, treatment information and what medication you are taking, so your doctor can help to manage your long-term health
- keep any appointments with other specialists or healthcare professionals
- **eat healthy foods**
- look after your body – clean any wounds as instructed by your medical team
- begin physical activity – with your doctor’s advice, begin gentle exercise
- be aware of your moods – people who have had a heart attack are at greater risk of **depression** than the general population. Speak with your doctor if you feel sad most of the time for more than two weeks
- book into a cardiac rehabilitation program – search for a program near you and book in to begin when your doctor says you are well enough
- if you smoke, **stop smoking**.

### **Beginning everyday activities after a heart attack**

Most people are keen to get back to their everyday lives, so ask your doctor when you can start activities. Things to consider include:

- travel – make sure you have a seat in buses, trains or cars in the early days after a heart attack
- air travel – you may need a medical clearance form, so ask your doctor before you plan air travel
- driving – ask your doctor about when your recovery may be advanced enough for you to drive, and ask your car insurance company or RACV about the possible impact of your heart attack on your insurance or driver’s licence
- physical activity – on your doctor’s advice, begin gentle walking and slowly build up
- sex – ask your doctor when it is safe to have sex. If you have had surgery, your doctor may advise you to wait until your wound has healed
- work – most people go back to work after having a heart attack, but if you have had surgery, it may take a little longer until you are ready. If you have a physical job, ask your doctor whether you need to have lighter duties.

### **Attending cardiac rehabilitation**

Cardiac rehabilitation is an excellent way to become educated about long-term lifestyle changes that will reduce your risk of having another heart event. Speak with your doctor about attending cardiac rehabilitation to set a good foundation for healthy living with your heart condition. **Cardiac rehabilitation clinics** are offered widely across Victoria.

Cardiac rehabilitation helps you to adjust to life with coronary heart disease by providing:

- education about your heart condition
- advice about exercise routines to suit your needs
- education about your medication
- education about lifestyle changes to improve your heart health, including healthy eating
- counselling about living with heart disease
- support to quit smoking

### **Where to get help**

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Your GP (doctor)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Heart Foundation Helpline** Tel. 13 11 12

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Heart Foundation

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