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British Heart  
Foundation

# Understanding heart surgery



Large print

## About this booklet

It can be scary to be told you need heart surgery, but surgery can treat your symptoms and may improve your quality of life.

This booklet can help you:

- understand what's going to happen and why
- prepare for what happens before and during surgery
- learn what to expect during recovery and after.

Please use this booklet as and when you need it. You do not have to read it all at once.



Call 0808 802 1234 (freephone) to speak to a cardiac nurse. Our helpline is open weekdays 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).

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## What is heart surgery?

Heart surgery means a surgeon will operate on your heart to fix it. This can help:



**treat your condition**



**give you a better quality of life**



**improve any symptoms you have**



**reduce your risk of having other heart conditions in the future.**

This booklet is a general guide to heart surgery, how to prepare, what happens during surgery and what to expect from your recovery.

## Why do I need surgery?

Here are some examples of surgeries and why you might have them.

- **Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery** – surgery for people who do not have enough blood supply to their heart muscle, for example after a heart attack.
- **Heart valve repair or replacement** – surgery to fix or replace your heart valves if one or more are not working properly.
- **Aortic surgery** – surgery to fix your aorta, the large blood vessel that takes blood away from your heart.
- **Heart transplant** – surgery for people who need their heart replacing, for example if you have heart failure.

Speak to your doctor about your condition, the surgery they're recommending and any other options you may have.

## What is a heart procedure?

This booklet is about surgery. But you may hear about heart procedures or minimally invasive procedures.

Procedures usually:

- use fewer and smaller cuts into your skin
- use more scans and X-rays
- are quicker than surgery
- have a faster recovery time
- mean you spend less time in hospital
- use local and other types of anaesthetic so you're awake but should not feel any pain.

Find information on heart procedures at **[bhf.org.uk/treatments](https://www.bhf.org.uk/treatments)**

Your doctor can tell you whether having a heart procedure is an option for you.

## What are the benefits and risks of surgery?

If your doctor is recommending surgery, it's because they think it's the best option for you.

All types of surgery come with risk. Your hospital team should explain any risks to you when you sign your consent form before having surgery (see page 20).

Ask them if you have any questions or concerns, they can help prepare you for what to expect.

You can also talk to one of our cardiac nurses.



Call 0808 802 1234 (freephone)  
or email [hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk](mailto:hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk).  
Our helpline is open weekdays,  
9am to 5pm (excluding  
bank holidays).

## How do I decide if I want to have surgery?

Your doctor will recommend the treatment they think is best for you based on your individual condition and health. You can ask them whether there are any other treatment options.

In some cases, doctors may decide the best treatment for you, for example if you need emergency surgery because of a heart attack or cardiac arrest.

It's important to remember that some conditions may not get better without surgery.

Talking it through with your doctor can help you make the decision that's right for you. It's ok to ask questions, even things that feel difficult or uncomfortable to talk about.

Questions that can help you decide include:

- What are the benefits and risks?
- Will I need another surgery or treatment?
- What will happen if I do not have the surgery?
- Are there other treatment options?
- Is there anything I need to do to prepare?
- How long will I be in hospital?
- What does recovery look like?
- Are there activities I need to avoid after, and how long for?
- Will I still need to take medicine after the surgery?
- What if I have caring responsibilities?
- Where can I get more information and support?

You can also take someone with you for support, or to write down answers. If the appointment is over the phone, you could put it on speakerphone and have someone with you to write things down.

## Will I need to wait for my surgery?

If you're having planned (elective) surgery you will be put on a waiting list.

This can be a worrying time. Remember that, even if you're waiting for surgery, there are places to get help:

- Speak to your doctor about your treatment and if any symptoms are new or getting worse.
- Talk to your local pharmacist for support with medicines.
- Call our cardiac nurses for help answering your questions (see page 59).
- Contact NHS 111 if your symptoms are getting worse or call 999 if you need urgent help.

## What can I do while I wait for surgery?

There are things you can do to prepare for your surgery and to make sure you recover as quickly as possible (see page 12).

Speak to your doctor about your situation and anything you may need to do to prepare.

If you smoke, you'll be encouraged to stop smoking before your surgery. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for support to quit smoking.



**Stay active** – try exercising little and often to build up your fitness. For example, start with a short walk, then build up to a longer distance or walking uphill.



**Eat well** – eating healthily can help your body to fight infections and heal. Find heart healthy recipes on our website at [bhf.org.uk/recipes](https://www.bhf.org.uk/recipes)



**Manage your weight** – living with excess weight or being underweight can increase some surgery risks, like getting an infection. Speak to your doctor for help managing your weight before surgery.



**Look after your emotional wellbeing** – focus on hobbies, like gardening, walking, seeing friends and family or spending time with pets. Many people find this helps distract them from negative thoughts.

## How can I prepare for my surgery?

Preparing for your surgery can help you to feel more in control and less nervous about what's going to happen.

Get organised for while you're in hospital:

- Arrange transport to and from the hospital.
- Book time off from work.
- Arrange for someone to look after children or pets while you're in hospital.
- Find out the visiting hours of the hospital.
- Wash your body and hair the day before your surgery.
- Find out if there's Wi-Fi so you can stay in touch with loved ones.
- Remove any jewellery, piercings and nail varnish.

Pack a bag of things you need:

- loose and comfortable clothes and pyjamas
- toiletries, like your toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush and soap
- healthy snacks that are low in sugar
- things to keep you busy, like books, podcasts and music
- any chargers you need for your phone or devices
- shoes that are easy to put on and take off, like slippers
- earplugs and an eye mask to help you sleep
- cases for dentures, glasses or hearing aids
- medicines you regularly take
- a soft, post-surgery bra, if you wear one.

Think about things you need when you get home:

- Do a food shop beforehand or organise a food delivery.
- Prepare a few healthy freezer meals.
- Arrange support for when you're home, such as your partner, friend or family.

### **Visit your dentist**

Before heart surgery, you'll need to visit your dentist to make sure that your teeth and gums are as healthy as possible. This is particularly important if you're having surgery on your heart valves.

Infected gums or teeth can cause bacteria to enter your bloodstream. This can lead to an infection in your heart called endocarditis.

## What happens before my surgery?

If you have a planned (elective) surgery, you'll usually have an appointment with a nurse to help you prepare. This is called a pre-operative assessment.

This appointment may happen a week or two before your surgery. It could be:



**in person**



**a phone call**



**a video call**

They will ask you about your health, medical history and home circumstances. You'll also have your weight checked.

You may also need to do some tests to check your general health, like:

- an electrocardiogram (ECG)
- an echocardiogram (echo)
- blood tests
- tests on your pee
- a pregnancy test
- tests on your lungs
- a scan of the arteries in your neck
- tests for infections, like MRSA.

The nurse will give you information on when to stop eating and drinking before your surgery. Tell them about any medicines you take and ask if you need to stop taking any before surgery.

This is a good time to ask any questions. If you need extra support during your recovery, speak to the nurse.

If you're not sure when your pre-operative appointment is, you can call the number on your appointment letter to find out.

## I'm feeling nervous

If you're feeling anxious about having heart surgery, you're not alone. To help yourself feel less nervous, you could:

- read about what's going to happen to prepare – use trusted sources like the NHS and British Heart Foundation
- focus on the benefits of your surgery
- plan activities for after you're recovered to look forward to
- talk to friends and family about how you're feeling
- distract yourself with hobbies and time with loved ones.

You can find ways to reduce stress and anxiety at **mind.org.uk**

## What happens on the day of my surgery?

On the day of your surgery, or sometimes the day before, you'll arrive at the hospital.

The nursing team will do some checks, like your blood pressure and heart rate. They may ask you to shave hair from parts of your body, like your chest, and have an anti-bacterial wash after. This is to reduce the chances of infection during surgery.

You may be offered medicine before your surgery, called a 'pre-med'. This is a sedative medicine that can help you feel more relaxed. You'll usually take it one or two hours before your surgery.

## Informed consent

On the day of your surgery, you'll be asked to give your permission (consent) for the surgery to happen.

A member of your surgery team will tell you what's going to happen and explain any risks to you. You will need to sign a consent form so they can do the surgery.

You can ask them any questions and get them to explain anything you're not sure about.

## What happens when it's time for my surgery?

You'll be given a hospital gown to wear. Then you'll be taken to a room where you'll have surgery, called an operating theatre.

The operating theatre can feel busy, as there are different healthcare professionals there to look after you and help during surgery. It can also be cold as this helps keep the room clean (sterile).

Before surgery you'll be given a general anaesthetic. This is like being asleep and you do not feel any pain.

A specialist doctor (an anaesthetist) gives you the anaesthetic before the surgery and stays with you to make sure you have enough to keep you asleep and comfortable.

There will be monitors to check your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels.

## What happens during open heart surgery?

Open heart surgery means the surgeon will work directly on your heart.

Your heart will be stopped, and you'll be put on a heart and lung machine (bypass machine). This helps pump blood around your body during surgery.

The surgeon will cut the bone in your chest so they can see your heart. This is called a sternotomy. They will then operate on your heart.

Once the surgeon has finished operating, they will start your heart again. Your heart will start beating and the heart and lung machine will be turned off.

Your breastbone will be fixed together using permanent metal wires and the skin on your chest is closed with dissolvable stitches (that melt away) or a special glue.

If you need surgery for other heart conditions, you may be more likely to have these at the same time. This is to reduce the chances of you needing another sternotomy.

### Beating heart surgery

Sometimes surgery can be carried out without stopping your heart. The surgery is performed on a beating heart and is called beating heart surgery or off-pump surgery.

## Other types of heart surgery

You may have heart surgery, but not open heart surgery. This is sometimes called minimal access or minimally invasive surgery. This means the surgeon will not open your chest (breastbone) completely.

Types of minimally invasive surgery include:

- **Mini thoracotomy** – a cut is made on the side of your chest to access your heart.
- **Partial sternotomy** – part of the bone in your chest is cut to get to your heart. It's usually cut at the bottom.

You will have general anaesthetic (like being asleep) and, if needed, you may be put on a heart and lung machine while having surgery.

Your doctor or surgeon can explain more about these types of surgery and answer any questions you have.

## Recovery in hospital

After heart surgery you'll normally stay in hospital for 5 to 10 days. Your doctor or surgeon can give you more information on how long you'll be in hospital.

### First 24 to 48 hours after surgery

You'll be taken to an intensive care unit (ICU) or special recovery unit.

Here you'll be closely looked after, and a nurse will stay by your side. The hospital team will make sure:

- you're recovering well
- you're breathing normally.

If you're recovering well, they will gradually wake you up. Once they're confident you can breathe by yourself, they will remove the tube that helps you breathe (see page 31).

## Waking up from surgery

Many people feel disorientated (not knowing where you are) when they wake up from surgery.

You'll have some wires or tubes coming out of your body (see page 28). These are to help the hospital team monitor and care for you. Some will be removed soon after you wake up, but others may stay in place while you're in hospital.

The general anaesthetic and tubes from surgery can affect your body in different ways. You may have:

- a sore throat
- pain or discomfort in your chest
- sickness (nausea)
- a salty or metallic taste in your mouth
- difficulty going for a poo (constipation).

Most of these symptoms should not last longer than a few days after your surgery. Some people find food does not have much of a taste for a while, but your taste will go back to normal.

If you've had your breastbone cut in surgery your chest will feel sore for longer.

Let the hospital staff looking after you know if you're in any pain or discomfort. They can give you stronger pain relief and other medicines to make you more comfortable.

You may have a button you can press that gives you more pain relief when you need it, called a patient controlled analgesia (PCA) button.

## Tubes and wires after surgery

You'll have some tubes and wires attached to your body after surgery. Some people will have a few but others may have more, especially if you've had open heart surgery.

These may include:

- a breathing tube to help you breathe (see page 31)
- small tubes in your arms, hands or neck to give you fluids or medicines
- a dressing on your chest covering the wound (cut) in your skin
- small stickers and wires will be put on your chest to check your heartbeat (ECG)
- a small tube in your wrist to check your blood pressure and take any blood samples
- a small tube (a catheter) in your bladder to empty it after your surgery

- drains are tubes, usually put in your chest area and the lower part of your leg, to help take any extra blood or fluid away from your wounds
- pacing wires (leads) in your heart to help control your heart rate (see page 30).

It's normal to feel alarmed or scared when you wake up and see all the wires and tubes. But most of these will be removed the morning after your surgery or after 24 hours.

## Pacing wires

When you wake up, you may have pacing wires coming out of your chest area.

Pacing wires are small thin wires that are put in to your heart and attached to a box outside your body. They check your heart rate is at a safe level during and after surgery.

They can also help give your heart an electrical impulse to keep your heart rate at a normal level.

When you no longer need them, they will be removed.

You may have the wires for longer if you need a pacemaker fitted after surgery. Your hospital team will explain this to you.

## Breathing and coughing

The tube in your mouth and throat helps you to breathe. It's attached to a breathing machine, called a ventilator. When you wake up it can make you want to cough and you will not be able to talk or drink.

It's usually removed shortly after surgery. After this you may need an oxygen mask or small nose tube to help you breathe for a few days.

You'll get help with breathing and coughing. This helps clear your lungs and reduces the chance of getting a chest infection.

If you've had your breastbone cut, you may worry about your chest wound. The steel wire used to close your breastbone is very strong and will not break when you cough.

You can use a pillow or rolled up towel to hold against your chest when you cough to reduce any pain or discomfort.

## Two to three days after surgery

Once you're recovering well, you'll be moved to a high dependency unit (HDU) or a ward.

The hospital team here will help you:

- with breathing and coughing
- be as comfortable as possible
- eat and drink small amounts
- move around a little.

They'll check your heart rate, blood pressure, temperature and breathing. You'll usually have a chest X-ray and some of the tubes may be removed (see page 28).

You'll also be visited by a physiotherapist who will help you with breathing and coughing.

## Three to four days after surgery

After this you'll be moved to a ward, usually a cardiothoracic ward.

You'll continue your recovery with the help of the hospital team. This includes:

- helping you to eat well
- making sure you're drinking enough fluids, like water
- getting you moving with short walks
- deep breathing exercises.

They will also check your heart rate, blood pressure, temperature and any dressings you have (material covering your wounds). You'll usually wear a portable heart monitor so you can move around.

On day four you'll usually have an ECG to check your heart rate and rhythm.

## Visits from family and friends

Some people feel low and emotional after surgery. This is normal and will usually pass after a few days. Visits from family and friends can help to make you feel better and distract you.

It's also normal for your friends and family to worry about you during surgery. Visiting you may help them feel reassured to see how you're recovering.

You could ask them to bring you fresh clothes, toiletries and activities to do together, like board games or puzzles.

They will have to wait until after your surgery to see you. They can ask a nurse how long it will be before they can see you, how many people can visit at one time and when the visiting hours are.

## What do I need before I go home?

Before you go home, it may help to ask the hospital team about:

- whether you need stitches removed and where to go
- how to look after your wound (cuts on your body)
- if they're prescribing any medicines and how to take them
- whether you're able to go to cardiac rehabilitation (see page 49)
- who to contact if you have questions or concerns
- when and where you will have a follow-up appointment.

## Recovery at home

When you go home, take things easy for a few weeks as you may feel more tired than usual. It can take time to get back into normal routines with sleeping, eating and daily activities.

You might find it helpful to have someone stay with you for the first few days or weeks once you return home.

Some people find they are not very hungry after surgery, but it's important to eat because it helps your body to heal. You could try eating smaller meals, more often to give you energy.

You could ask friends and family for support with everyday tasks, like cooking, food shopping, walking pets and picking children up from school.

It's normal to feel nervous after having surgery. You may be worried about moving around. Some people also feel confused or forgetful for a couple of weeks after having general anaesthetic.

If you live alone or need extra support at home, speak to a healthcare professional before you leave hospital.



## Pain relief after surgery

You'll be given pain relief after your surgery. It's important to take your pain relief as prescribed by your doctor because it helps you recover and get back to your daily activities.

Your doctor will usually recommend reducing your pain relief over a number of days or weeks after surgery. They will tell you when it's ok to stop taking it.

If you stop your pain relief early or do not take it regularly your recovery time may be longer.

Speak to your doctor if you have any questions about medicines you're taking, your pain is not getting better or it's getting worse. It's important to get help when you need it.

## How long will it take to recover?

Recovery takes time and everyone recovers at different speeds.

The hospital team can give you exercises to do at home to build up your strength and help you heal.

You should be able to do most of your normal activities after about six weeks, including working, driving and sex. If you have a heavy manual job, you may need to rest for longer.

Most people make a full recovery within 12 weeks. However, it can take longer to feel emotionally and physically recovered. Cardiac rehabilitation can help you recover and get back to your daily routine (see page 49).

Speak to your doctor about your situation and what to expect from recovery.

## Are there things I should avoid?

Before you go home, someone will have a chat with you about your recovery and what you can and cannot do.

Continue the activities and exercises you started in hospital, but do not overdo it. Listen to your body and stop if you get any pain.

If you have any wounds (cuts) on your body, you'll need to avoid putting too much strain or weight on the area until it's healed. For example, avoid:

- ✗ using a vacuum cleaner
- ✗ carrying heavy bags
- ✗ lifting heavy pans when cooking
- ✗ lifting or carrying children or pets
- ✗ some gardening, like mowing or digging
- ✗ walking a dog that pulls on a lead.

If your breastbone was cut, it's best to avoid lifting more than the weight of a half-filled kettle until it's healed. Usually, it takes six to eight weeks to recover.

Use both hands for activities to even out the pressure on your chest. This will mean you have less pain.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you need any help with daily activities.



## How do I look after my wound?

After your surgery you'll have a wound (cut) on your chest and may have smaller wounds on your body. These can feel sore, itchy or numb while they heal.

The cuts will be covered by dressings which are usually removed three to seven days after your surgery.

You'll need to keep any cuts and dressings dry and clean. You should be told how to look after them before you leave the hospital.

If you need your dressing looked at once you've left hospital, you'll normally need to make an appointment to see a nurse or doctor at your GP practice.

Once the dressing has been removed, do:

- ✓ shower normally
- ✓ use unperfumed soap to wash
- ✓ pat your wound dry.

Do not:

- ✗ have a bath (unless you do not have a shower at home)
- ✗ put soap directly on your wound
- ✗ use perfumed soaps, creams or powders on your wound
- ✗ rub your wound.

If you do not have a shower at home, you may be able to have a bath. Speak to your hospital team before you leave about how to safely get in and out of the bath.

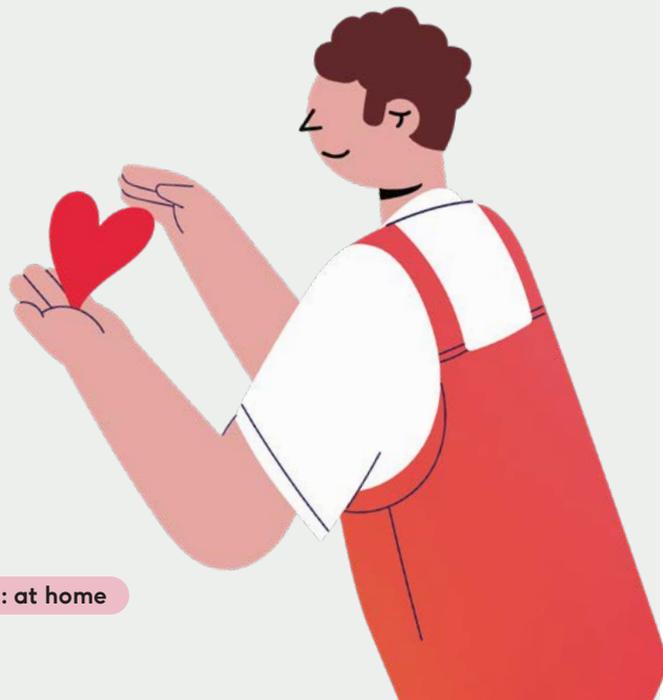
The metal wires used to hold your breastbone together stay in place. But the stitches or glue in your skin will dissolve (melt away) a few weeks after surgery as your skin heals.

## When to get help

Expect to have some bruising and tenderness as you heal. But contact your doctor if:

- you get any pain, redness or swelling around your wounds
- the bruising gets worse
- you notice any yellow-coloured fluid or blood from your wounds
- you have a temperature (38°C or above).

If you're worried about any symptoms after surgery, speak to your GP or call NHS 111.



## Tips after surgery

### Clothes

After surgery you may find some clothes uncomfortable or difficult to wear. You may want to buy soft, stretchy tops or clothes that fasten at the front so they're easier to get on and off.

### Bras

If you wear a bra and the bone in your chest has been cut, you'll need to wear a post-surgery bra for up to 12 weeks after surgery.

If you need to buy a post-surgery bra, get one that:

- ✓ fastens at the front
- ✓ is made of soft material
- ✓ has soft seams
- ✓ does not have underwires
- ✓ has a simple design (lace or other decoration can be uncomfortable).

## Sleeping positions

If you sleep on your side, you may get pain from your chest wound for the first few weeks. You could try sleeping in a chair that reclines or using pillows on either side of you in bed, so that you do not roll over.

## Getting out of bed or chairs

Your chest wound may make it difficult to get out of bed or low chairs while it's healing. You can buy chair raisers that make your bed or chair higher so it's easier to get out of them. You can also get support to hold on to, called a bed assist rail or grab bar.

You should be shown how to get in and out of beds and chairs before you leave hospital. Speak to the nurses in hospital about occupational therapy. Occupational therapists can support you when you get home.

## Seatbelts

If you find wearing a seatbelt is painful after the surgery, try putting a soft jumper, towel or small pillow between your chest and the seatbelt.

## Scars after surgery

You'll have a scar down the middle of your chest. You may also have smaller cuts on your arms or legs.

It's normal to be worried about having scars after surgery but you're not alone.

Find information and support from the charity Changing Faces at [changingfaces.org.uk](https://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

## What follow-up appointments will I have?

After surgery it's important to know where to go if you have any questions or need help.

You'll usually be given a follow-up appointment at the hospital. Ask the hospital team when this might be and who to contact if you have not got an appointment. It's important to go to appointments even if you feel well.

After this appointment you'll usually be discharged from hospital care if you're recovering well. Your GP can help you with any questions or concerns.

You can also speak to **NHS 111** or your local pharmacy for help and support. If you're not sure who to speak to, call our cardiac nurses (see page 59).

## What is cardiac rehabilitation?

After your surgery you may be offered cardiac rehabilitation (cardiac rehab).

Cardiac rehab is a programme of exercise and education sessions. It can be done online, in person or a mix of both. It's a vital part of your recovery, helping you get back to as full a life as possible.

It's also a good opportunity to meet other people going through a similar situation and ask any questions you may have.

Find out more in our **Understanding cardiac rehabilitation** booklet. Order your free copy at **bhf.org.uk/publications**

Speak to your doctor about whether cardiac rehab is available for you. You can also find your local cardiac rehab team. Search **www.cardiac-rehabilitation.net** for their contact details.

## Will I need to take medicine after surgery?

You'll be given medicine after surgery, such as pain relief or blood thinners (anticoagulants). Your hospital team will let you know what medicine you need and how long to take it for.

You may take medicine for a few days or weeks, but some people will need to take medicine for longer.

It's important to take any medicines you're prescribed because they help you recover.

Speak to your GP, pharmacist or cardiac rehab nurses if you have any questions about medicines.

Read more at [bhf.org.uk/medication](https://www.bhf.org.uk/medication)

## Getting into a routine

It can help your recovery to get into a routine. This helps your body to recover physically and emotionally.

This includes:

- getting up and going to bed at the same time each day
- taking your medicines regularly and as prescribed
- having meals at regular times
- giving yourself a rest in the afternoon
- daily exercise or stretches
- listening to your body and resting when needed.

Spending time with loved ones or pets, accepting help from others and doing activities you enjoy can also help you feel more positive during recovery.

Some people also find keeping a diary helps with their recovery. It can help you see how well you're improving and note down any questions or concerns.

## Exercise

Exercise can help you live a happier and healthier life. It can help you manage your condition and recover.

It's important to speak to your doctor about:

- the surgery you've had
- any activities you need to avoid
- when you can start exercising
- what exercise is safe for you.

It's normal to worry if you should exercise. Speak to your doctor if you're thinking of starting a new exercise after your surgery.

Your GP may also be able to recommend local exercise schemes, gyms or classes you can join.

Find ways to get active on our website: [bhf.org.uk/activity](https://www.bhf.org.uk/activity)



## Sex

You can continue to enjoy a healthy sex life once you've recovered from surgery and your symptoms are controlled.

You may want to find other ways of being intimate if you're struggling with symptoms or recovering from surgery. Your partner could take a more active role in intimacy. Some people find putting a soft pillow over their wounds helps make sex more comfortable.

Your doctor will have talked to lots of other people about sex. It may not be easy to talk about at first, but most people say they feel reassured when they do.

Read more on our website at [bhf.org.uk/sex](https://www.bhf.org.uk/sex)



## Healthy living

Your doctor will usually recommend making changes to your daily life to look after your health, improve symptoms and reduce your risk of other heart conditions.

Changes include:



**getting more exercise**



**stopping smoking**



**having less salt, saturated fat and sugar in your diet**



**maintaining a healthy weight**



**reducing the amount of alcohol you drink.**

It can feel overwhelming to think about changes to your daily life. But you can make small swaps over time to build up healthier habits.

Order our free booklet **Understanding your heart health** for simple swaps and healthy tips. Order it online at [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications)



## Work

Everyone is different. When you can go back to work depends on:

- what surgery you've had
- the type of work you do
- how you're feeling and your energy levels.

If your work does not involve heavy lifting or labour, then you can usually go back to work after six weeks. If you're on your feet or doing heavy lifting, you may need to be off work for up to 12 weeks.

Your employer may also be able to make adjustments to your work, like reducing your hours or a phased return to work.

Read more on our website at [bhf.org.uk/work](https://www.bhf.org.uk/work)

## Driving

If you've had surgery on your heart, you'll usually need to stop driving for a short time. For example:

- coronary artery bypass surgery – stop driving for at least four weeks
- heart valve surgery – stop driving for at least four weeks
- heart transplant – stop driving for at least six weeks.

Speak to your doctor about the surgery you've had and how long you need to stop driving for. Only start driving again once your doctor says you can.

Usually, you do not need to tell the DVLA if you've had heart surgery, unless you have symptoms that affect your ability to drive safely.

Read more about driving after heart surgery on our website at [bhf.org.uk/driving](https://www.bhf.org.uk/driving)

## Holidays and insurance

Talk to your doctor or surgeon if you have a holiday planned after your surgery. It's not usually recommended to take a long-haul flight soon after having surgery.

If you're diagnosed with a heart condition or you've had surgery, you need to tell your life, travel and car insurance provider.

It's important to make sure your insurance provider knows about your condition and treatment in case you need to claim in the future.

Find out more about holidays and insurance at [bhf.org.uk/practicalsupport](https://www.bhf.org.uk/practicalsupport)

## Get support

It's normal to feel a mix of emotions if you or your loved ones are facing heart surgery.

Talking it through and finding out what to expect can help you feel prepared.

Here are some of the ways British Heart Foundation can support you:

### Call the Heart Helpline

Our cardiac nurses can help you and your loved ones with questions or concerns.

Call **0808 802 1234** (freephone) or email [hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk](mailto:hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk)  
Our helpline is open weekdays, 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).

You can also contact our nurses using the live chat feature. Find out more at [bhf.org.uk/helpline](https://www.bhf.org.uk/helpline)

## Join Heart Matters

Discover the benefits of Heart Matters, your free heart-health membership.

Join to receive our free magazine or email newsletter, featuring expert tips, heart-healthy recipes, inspiring stories, and the latest updates backed by BHF-funded science.

Guided by our team of experts, Heart Matters helps you to make small changes for a healthier heart.

**[bhf.org.uk/heartmatters](https://bhf.org.uk/heartmatters)**

## Order our information

We have lots of information about living with a heart condition and looking after your heart.

You can read and order our booklets for free at **[bhf.org.uk/publications](https://bhf.org.uk/publications)**

We also have information in audio, easy read, braille and other languages. Read or listen to our information online at **[bhf.org.uk/infoforall](https://bhf.org.uk/infoforall)**

## Find an online community

Our community on HealthUnlocked is a free online space for people with heart and circulatory conditions to share experiences and get support from one another.

Visit **[healthunlocked.com](https://healthunlocked.com)**

## Have your say

We want people with lived experience of heart and circulatory conditions to be involved in everything we do.

Join Heart Voices, our patient and public involvement (PPI) network. The network can connect you with opportunities to take part in our lifesaving work.

By getting involved, you'll have the chance to share your insights with us and build connections with people who have been through similar experiences as you.

Join the network at [bhf.org.uk/heart-voices](https://bhf.org.uk/heart-voices)

For further information from BHF on heart surgery, scan here or visit [bhf.org.uk/heartsurgery](https://bhf.org.uk/heartsurgery)



# We are British Heart Foundation



Through research, information and support we're here for everyone affected by heart and circulatory conditions.

## Get help

Speak to one of our experienced cardiac nurses for more information and support. They can help answer your questions, big or small.

You can call **0808 802 1234** (freephone). Our helpline is open weekdays, 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).

## Support our work

If you've found this information helpful and would like to support our work, please scan the QR code or visit [bhf.org.uk/support-us](https://bhf.org.uk/support-us)



Scan here with  
the camera  
on your phone

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