

# Guidelines for activity

	Cardiac surgery	Minimally invasive valve surgery
ACTIVITY	TIME AFTER	TIME AFTER
Driving a motor vehicle	6–8 weeks	6 weeks
Housework		
Light: washing/drying dishes (not heavy pots and pans), wiping down benches, making cups of tea/coffee, simple snack	1–6 weeks	1–6 weeks
Moderate: mopping, making beds, ironing, hanging out light washing	6–12 weeks	6–8 weeks
Heavy: scrubbing shower/bath, hanging out towels/sheets	At least 12 weeks	6–12 weeks
Vacuuming	8–12 weeks	6–12 weeks
Sweeping	At least 4 weeks	4 weeks
Cooking (light meals)	At least 3 weeks	2 weeks
Gardening		
Light: watering with hose, pot plant activities	2–6 weeks	2–6 weeks
Moderate: pruning, watering with watering can, raking	6–12 weeks	6 weeks
Heavy: mowing, digging, heavy weeding, sawing, chopping	At least 12 weeks	8 weeks
Lawn mowing: may need assistance to start mower	12 weeks	8 weeks
Weeding	6–10 weeks	6 weeks
Golf		
Putting	4–6 weeks	4 weeks
Chip	8–12 weeks	6 weeks
Drive	12 weeks	6 weeks
Tennis / fishing	At least 12 weeks	8–12 weeks
Bowls	8–12 weeks	6–8 weeks
Sexual activity	No restrictions Gradual return	No restrictions Gradual return
Work (please check with surgeon)		
Sedentary	4–8 weeks	2–4 weeks
Moderate	8–12 weeks	4–6 weeks
Heavy	12 weeks	6–8 weeks

## Remember

When you go home, gauge your recovery from week-to-week, instead of day-to-day. You will find that with each week you are able to accomplish more.

Your family are a great source of strength and support so remember to ask for their assistance. It is also important to do things for yourself. You need to take an active role in your recovery.

## Further information

If you have any queries please contact your Specialist or GP. Visit the Heart Foundation website at [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au) for additional information about coronary artery disease. Alternatively, you can obtain a copy of the booklet *My Heart My Life* by completing the request form found in the brochure provided by your nurse.

## St Vincent's Private Hospital Northside


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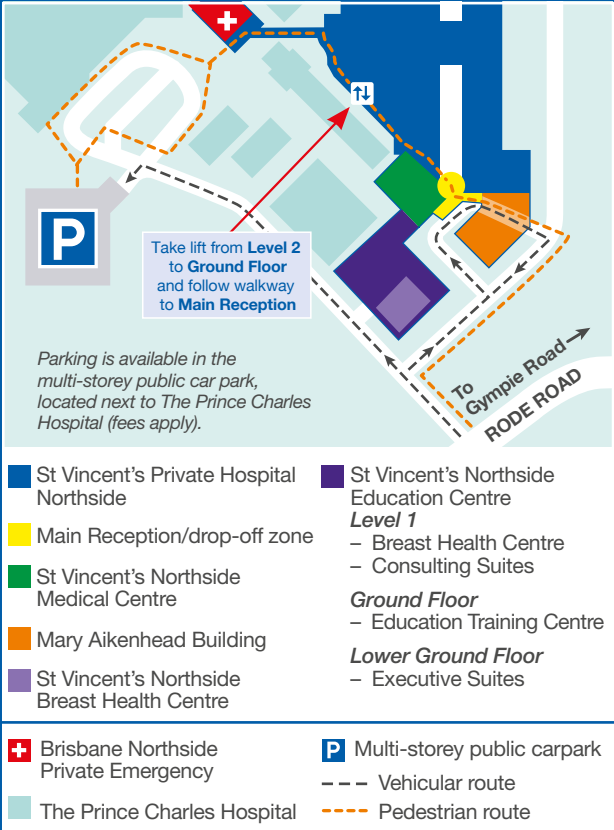
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 Developed in consultation with our consumers (October 2016)

UNDER THE STEWARDSHIP OF MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES

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Discharge  
information  
following  
cardiac surgery/  
minimally invasive  
valve surgery



ST VINCENT'S  
PRIVATE HOSPITAL  
NORTHSIDE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA

The following information is provided as a guide for your recovery. Please follow the instructions provided by your doctor. Prior to your discharge, please ask your nurse for clarification of any instructions you may be unsure about.

## Wound care

- Wash your wound(s) daily in the shower.
- It is recommended to use a mild, non-fragranced soap.
- Do not use perfumed soaps, scrubs, powder or creams on wound until completely healed.
- Do not take a bath, soak in a spa or go into a swimming pool until the wound is healed.
- Use a fresh clean towel (face washer/flannel can be used) daily to pat dry your wounds.
- If you have pets – avoid them coming into direct contact with your wounds until they have healed.
- As the wound heals, the red scar will shrink to a thin white line. You may notice a slight bump at the top of your chest wound. This should gradually disappear. Remember everyone heals at a different rate.
- If your wound site becomes reddened, inflamed, hot to touch, has ooze or becomes more painful, seek medical advice immediately.

## Care of your sternum (*sternotomy patients only*)

- You need to allow your sternum (breastbone) time to heal (this can take up to three months).
- Sleeping on your side is not recommended. If you cannot sleep on your back, place pillows under your back or shoulder blades to keep your chest area open.
- Your sternum will be examined by your surgeon at your six week appointment after discharge.
- If you experience a ‘clicking’ or ‘grating’ sensation from your sternal wound contact your doctor.

## Activity and exercise

- What you do with one arm you should do with the other i.e. symmetrical exercises.
- Activities should be gradually increased.
- It is quite common for some patients to suffer from muscular pain in their backs after surgery. If you have any concerns, talk to your doctor.
- Wait at least an hour after meals before attempting exercise.
- Stop any activity if you experience excessive wound pain.
- Slow down if you become short of breath.
- You should follow the instructions given to you by your physiotherapist. Talk to your surgeon or physiotherapist if you have concerns.

## Cardiac rehabilitation program

This is a program that is forms part of your ongoing care. It is an education and exercise program that encourages lifestyle modification and is also a great source of support. The nursing staff will discuss your eligibility to attend and where applicable will refer you to a service nearest you.

This service will contact you. If you haven’t heard from them within 14 days of your discharge please call our Cardiac Rehab Team on 07 **3326 3276**.

## General advice

- **Do not drive for six weeks after your surgery.**
- Wear your TED stockings all the time for a minimum of two weeks after discharge and do not cross your legs. After that, you can wear them for 12 hours/day until six weeks have passed.
- Rest is very important. Make sure you take enough rest breaks in between your normal daily activities. Your normal sleep patterns should return within a few weeks.
- Along with exercise, healthy eating will speed-up your recovery and healing.
- It is recommended that you have someone to care for you in the first two weeks after discharge.

- Please see your local GP within 1–2 weeks after discharge.
- **Please inform your dentist before any work is performed.** Patients who have had valve surgery must be prescribed prophylactic antibiotics before any dental procedures for the rest of their lives. Prophylactic antibiotics are antibiotics which are given to you to prevent an infection instead of being given to you when you have an infection. The bacteria that normally live in your mouth and on your teeth can get into your blood system during dental treatment. These can settle on artificial heart valves and damage them.

## Common side effects following cardiac surgery

**Pain:** it is normal to experience aches, pains and stiffness after your operation. This will improve. It is best to prevent pain by taking painkillers regularly. Taking pain relief at night may help with sleeping. Also holding a pillow or towel against your chest when coughing can help.

**Depression/anxiety:** in the days after your operation, especially while you are healing, it is normal to feel a little ‘down in the dumps’, anxious and/or more emotional than normal. However if these feelings continue, seek medical advice.

**Tiredness:** is usually your body telling you that you ‘did too much yesterday’. Don’t be surprised at how exhausting simple activities can be.

**Lethargy:** stay active and continue with the exercises provided by your physiotherapist.

**Sweating:** is common, especially at night. Others may find it hard to keep warm. If this persists for longer than a few days after you leave hospital, contact your doctor.

**Palpitations or a fast heartbeat:** it is normal to be aware of your heart beating after surgery. It may be most noticeable when you are lying flat. Occasionally an uneven heartbeat may occur. This is not serious but you should contact your doctor if it continues.

**Sleeplessness:** if you have difficulty sleeping at night, perhaps you need to be more active through the day. Take fewer naps and avoid tea and coffee. Your sleeping patterns will return to normal as you recover, usually within two to three weeks.

**Constipation:** many pain-relieving medications can cause constipation. Ensure that you eat a diet high in fibre and drink plenty of fluids. Walking also assists with relieving constipation.

**Hallucinations and/or vivid dreams:** are more common in the first couple of days after surgery. This normally settles down in the first few weeks.

**Leg/arm numbness:** if you had veins/artries taken for Coronary Artery Bypass Graft surgery (CABG) you may have some swelling, numbness and tingling in the affected limb for a few weeks after your surgery. This is due to the nerves recovering and other blood vessels taking over the work of the missing vein. This should settle down after about three months. In the meantime, try keeping your leg elevated when sitting.

**Poor appetite:** if your appetite is poor, try to eat smaller but more frequent meals. Have a high fibre diet and keep yourself well hydrated. You may experience a strange metallic taste in your mouth, find food has lost its flavour or find that your sense of smell has changed.

**Poor memory and concentration:** although you may not feel as mentally sharp immediately after surgery, your mental (cognitive) functions should return after you have recovered and rested. Over time, your memory, concentration, orientation and verbal understanding should return to pre-surgery level. It may take a few weeks before you can resume performing mentally stressful tasks, so be patient.

**Eyesight changes:** your eyesight may be a little worse or have changed since your surgery. This will return to pre-surgery level (i.e. normal for you) in a few weeks. If you feel the strength of your glasses has changed since your surgery, please wait at least six weeks before you have a check-up.

**Sore throat and hoarse voice:** this is due to the insertion of the breathing tube during the operation. This should settle down quickly.