

## Exercise and activity in the longer term

In general, exercise and normal activities should be promoted as your child grows. Exercise and play are vital for the health of children, and the benefits of regular exercise outweigh any risks for nearly all patients. The general rule is to encourage exercise as the child is able, but for any specific questions, please seek advice from your cardiologist at follow-up appointments.



## Summary

- The wound is strong by four to six weeks after the operation, and fully healed by three months.
- Do not pull your baby up by the arms or hands for the first six weeks
- Encourage normal development, especially “tummy time”
- Do not let older brothers/sisters/cousins play roughly with your baby, especially while the wound heals
- Encourage exercise as your child grows up

*If you have any questions about any of this information, or would like further details, please ask to speak to the physiotherapist.*

**DATE OF OPERATION:**

**SIX WEEKS AFTER OPERATION DATE:**

**PHYSIOTHERAPIST:**

## Recovering after Cardiac Surgery - Information for Patients and Families

*Infants (up to one year)*



## After the operation

Getting out of bed soon after an operation helps with recovery. Your baby will often be allowed out of bed for a cuddle the day after the operation. Your nurse will advise you if this is the case.

In the following days, begin to encourage normal play and activities again, such as “tummy time”. There is no set rule about how soon your baby can be placed on his/her stomach - this may commence as soon as your baby is comfortable. Around four to seven days after the operation is often a good time to try. Your baby

will let you know if he/she is uncomfortable. If your baby has been unwell after the operation, it may be necessary to wait for some time longer before recommencing tummy time. Check with the



physiotherapist in this situation.

The physiotherapist can also show you some ways to make the transition back to onto the tummy more comfortable.

### Returning to normal activities

Babies will tend to do only as much as they feel able to, and this will increase over the days and weeks as they recover. They will naturally avoid activities that cause pain. Activities will depend upon the age and developmental stage of your baby; however even in the very early days after the operation, it is important to allow

Make sure you continue giving your baby opportunities to develop, eg. tummy time, sitting (if at an appropriate age) and rolling. So many skills are learned in the first year of life that it is important to encourage normal development to continue as your baby recovers, rather than restricting it.

### Lifting your baby while the wound is healing

In the first days after the operation, your baby may find it uncomfortable if you lift him/her from under the arms. After this time, lifting in this way is all right to do, as long as your baby is able to hold up his/her head.

For six weeks after the operation, babies should **not** be pulled up by their hands or arms. This will avoid stress to the wound. Let any family or friends who may look after your baby during those first six weeks know about this.

Both arms should be moving equally well by the time your baby is discharged from hospital. If you have concerns about arm movements, ask to speak to the ward physiotherapist.

### Things to avoid while the wound is healing

As discussed earlier, babies will not continue with activities that cause them pain, and therefore it is very unlikely that they could hurt themselves when playing. Ensure that older brothers and sisters do not play too roughly with your baby.

## Physiotherapy and your baby's development

Sometimes having a cardiac condition can mean your baby has been slower to develop than normal. Babies who have spent a lot of time in hospital, or who have to work hard just to breathe often don't have the energy for learning to hold their heads up, or to sit up.

Correcting or improving the cardiac condition can make a big difference, however it can be helpful to have a therapist give you some ideas whilst in hospital, or if appropriate, refer you to a community therapist. You can contact the ward physiotherapist with questions or concerns about your baby's development, or if you would like some ideas to help encourage development.



