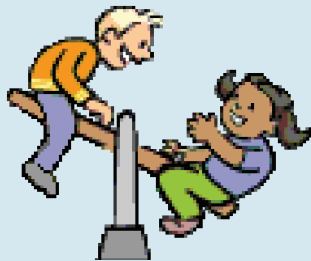


Exercise and activity in the longer term

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.



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

Summary

- Do not pull your child up by the hands or arms for the first four weeks after surgery.
- For the first four to six weeks after surgery, no rough play, trampolines, two-wheeled bikes, or anything where your child could get a big “bang” to the chest. Also during this time, no climbing ladders, trees or jungle gyms. After the first four to six weeks, if these activities do not cause pain, they are all right to do.
- Your child can go swimming once the wound is dry (about two weeks after the operation), but must not climb the ladder to get in or out of the pool.
- Encourage good posture
- Back to school/kindergarten/daycare by four weeks after the operation
- Your child should be completely recovered by two to three months after the operation

DATE OF OPERATION:

FOUR WEEKS AFTER OPERATION DATE:

THREE MONTHS AFTER OPERATION DATE:

PHYSIOTHERAPIST:

Recovering after Cardiac Surgery - Information for Patients and Families

Toddlers and Young Children (between one and five years)



After the operation

Getting out of bed soon after an operation helps with recovery. Your child will often be helped out of bed for a cuddle or to sit in a chair the day after the operation. Your nurse will advise you if this is the case.

In the following days, begin to gently encourage normal activities again, such as sitting up in bed to play. Often, your child will be encouraged and assisted to take a short walk on the second day after the operation. This should be done with the assistance of the physiotherapist and/or nurse. (If your child has had to stay in bed for longer than one day after the operation, walking will be delayed accordingly.)



Toddlers and young children will usually tend to do as much as they feel able to, and this will increase over the days and weeks as they recover. Sometimes they

do require some encouragement, and you, the nurses and the physiotherapist can help with this.

Returning to normal activities

By the time your child leaves hospital, he/she should be walking as well as before the operation. Children between two and four years of age, should be back to their normal dressing, feeding and bathing abilities, should be able to walk for five to ten minutes at a time (with good posture), and go up and down stairs as required.

Your child should be able to move both arms equally and normally by the time he/she is discharged from hospital. If you have concerns about arm movements, ask to speak to the ward physiotherapist.

Once you and your child have returned home, it is important to continue to build up exercise tolerance with a gradual increase in activity. For very young children, this may involve building up the length of time they spend with normal play activities, and beginning to include more vigorous games. For slightly older children, a walking program is good for regaining fitness. Two or three walks daily of five to ten minutes each is a good place to start. This can be increased gradually until your child can walk up to twenty or thirty minutes at a time (by four weeks after the operation). There are some other activities that must be avoided at first. See the next section for details.

It is normal to feel more tired than usual for a few weeks following surgery. However, it is better to allow your child to have an afternoon nap than limit the amount of activity he/she does. Children may be back at daycare, kindergarten or school (if applicable) by four weeks after the operation. Sometimes children returning to school prefer to start by attending in the mornings only, and then building up to full days.

The rough guide to recovery is that four weeks after the operation, children should be functioning at 80 - 90% of their capacity, and back to 100% by two to three months

after the operation.

Activities to avoid

In the first days after the operation, your child may find it uncomfortable if you lift him/her from under the arms. After this time, as your child recovers and begins to move more freely, lifting in this way is all right to do.

For four weeks after the operation, **children 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 child during those first four weeks know about this.

The first four to six weeks after surgery are an important time for wound healing, and at the end of this period, the wound is usually very strong. Complete healing takes three months. **The things to avoid** in the first four to six weeks are rough play, trampolines and two-wheeled bikes, or anything that could involve a big fall or a big knock to the chest. Any activity where your child must pull him/herself up by the arms must also be avoided, for example, climbing ladders, trees, jungle gyms, monkey bars. After these first four to six weeks, if the activities listed above do not cause pain, your child may start doing them again.

Once the wound is dry (about two weeks after the operation), swimming is allowed. However, it is important that children are lifted in and out of the pool rather than using the pool ladder.