

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 takes four to six weeks to become strong, and three months to heal completely
- In the first four to six weeks, no rough play, trampolines, two-wheeled bikes, climbing, trees/ladders, monkey bars, or any activities where your child could get a big “bang” to the chest.
- Swimming is okay when the wound is dry (two weeks after the operation), but no climbing in/out of the pool for six weeks
- No lifting heavy objects for four to six weeks
- Back to school four weeks after the operation
- Lots of walking and running around is important for being healthy. Start with two or three walks daily of five to ten minutes each. Build up each week until your child can walk twenty to thirty minutes at a time (by four weeks after the operation).
- Encourage good posture

DATE OF OPERATION:

FOUR WEEKS AFTER OPERATION DATE:

THREE MONTHS AFTER OPERATION DATE:

PHYSIOTHERAPIST:

Recovering after Cardiac Surgery - Information for Patients and Families

*Older Children and Teenagers
(aged six and older)*



After the Operation

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

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.

In the following days, you and the nursing staff can begin

to gently encourage/assist with more normal activities, such as longer periods sitting out in a chair, and regular walks on the ward. Encourage upright posture if necessary, as it is best to avoid getting into a habit of being slumped.



Returning to normal activities

By the time your child leaves hospital, he/she should be walking as well as before the operation. Children should be back to their normal ability for dressing, feeding and bathing, be able walk for five to ten minutes at a time, 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 daily walks. Two to three walks daily of five to ten minutes each is a good place to start, and 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).

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 some rest or sleep time than to limit the amount of activity he/she does. Children should be back at school within four weeks of the operation, or sooner if you and the doctors are both happy with this. Sometimes children returning to school may start by attending for mornings only. When returning to school, it is useful to discuss with his/her teacher/s the information from this brochure about what activities are safe to do in the weeks and months after cardiac surgery.

The rough guide to recovery is that four weeks after the operation, children should be functioning at 80 to 90% of their capacity, and back to 100% by two to three months after the operation. **There are some activities that must be avoided** at first. See the next section for details.

Activities to avoid

The stitches and/or wires used to close a wound are very strong. By four to six weeks after the operation, the wound is usually very strong. Healing is complete by three months.

In the first four to six weeks, **do not pull your child up by the arms**. If your child is still small enough to be lifted by an adult, they may find it uncomfortable to be lifted from under the arms in the first few days after the operation. Once this is comfortable to do, there is no restriction on lifting this way.

The **things to avoid** in the first four to six weeks are rough play, jungle gyms, monkey bars, trampolines and two-wheeled bikes, or anything that could involve a big fall or a big knock to the chest. Lifting heavy objects must also be avoided. Try to minimise the weight of school bags, etc. If these activities do not cause pain at the end of the six weeks, it is all right to re-commence these things.

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.

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

