



CARDIAC Post-Operative Care

Dr Davidson will discuss the pertinent points of your post-operative care with you upon discharge but in general the following information is applicable to most patients:

Wound Care: Upon discharge, it is strongly recommended that you shower daily, but it is vitally important that you do not bath for the first six weeks, as the wounds must not be soaked in water for a long period of time. You may use your usual brand of soap and wash normally. After showering, dry the wounds well and then clean them twice daily with Surgical Spirits. Do not use Savlon or any other disinfectants as these may cause rashes that can impair wound healing. If you are concerned about the possibility of infection, or there is a slight oozing from the wound, then please dress the wound with Mercurochrome after cleaning it with the spirits. If the wound remains red and inflamed, or oozes copiously, or emits puss, then please contact the rooms to schedule an urgent appointment with Dr Davidson.

Stitches & Clips: While Dr Davidson closes most wounds subcutaneously (that is with dissolvable stitches), the drain stitches and any skin clips used would need to be removed around 10 days after discharge from hospital. An appointment should be made by the ward staff for you to attend the local wound clinic upon discharge.

Please note: The drain sites may take more than one month to heal completely. The wounds in the beginning may often look red and mucky. Often after removal of the drain stitch, the wound may open up a bit and may ooze a small amount of fluid. This is usually not cause for alarm. Please continue to clean the wounds with Surgical Spirits twice daily until nicely healed. If still concerned about the possibility of infection, then please dress the drain sites with Mercurochrome after the spirits.

Sternal (Chest Bone) Care: It usually takes about six weeks after the operation for the chest bone (or sternum) to form new bony bridging across the break and a further six weeks thereafter for the sternum to mature into solid strong bone. While the sternum is held together firmly by sternal wires and plates during this time, it is of particular importance not to place any undue strain on the chest bone.

Please note: One may not drive a car for the first six weeks after the operation. When climbing in- and out of the car, please do not pull yourself up or lower yourself down into the car using the overhead handle as this places an inordinate amount of strain on the chest bone. We do not recommend any push-up or pulling motions, like pushing shopping trolleys or lawn mowers, during this period. One should also not lift anything heavier than 3.5kg for the first six weeks after the operation and 7kg for the next six weeks thereafter.

After this three month recovery period, one should be able to return to life as normal. You may resume your golf swing, go to the gym and ride your motorbike again; but please remember the old adage of "Start Low and Go Slow" while you regain your strength.

Pain: It is common after the removal of the drainage pipes in the ICU or the ward for one to have very little pain from the operation. However, it is also easier to prevent pain than it is to treat once you have deep seated or intense pain, so please make use of the pain tablets regularly as prescribed.

Medication: You will be given a new prescription upon discharge from hospital. Please note that this will often differ from your prior prescription. The list of medication will be explained to you by Dr Davidson at the time of discharge.

Of great importance:

**Please use the medication exactly as prescribed and
DO NOT mix medication from your old script with the medication from your new one.**

Dizzy Spells or Fainting: Please note that it is fairly common after a heart operation to experience dizzy spells or feel as if you want to faint - particularly when standing up quickly. It takes time for your heart to respond to changes in position. This will improve with time as your heart and body heals; but in the beginning, it is vitally important not to get up too quickly. So when getting out of bed, please sit up and wait a minute or two for your heart to recover. Then swing your legs over the edge of the bed and again wait a minute or two. Stand up and again pause, holding onto the edge of the bed for support, before walking off. Remember to do the same thing when getting up from a chair or the toilet.

If you do feel dizzy, stop immediately and hold onto something for support, or sit down if you can safely do so. Then take 10 deep breaths in- and out as slowly as possible. You should feel much better thereafter and can resume walking. If the feeling persists though, or if you continue to feel faint, please have your blood pressure and sugar checked, and contact Dr Davidson's rooms as soon as possible for further assistance.

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Fluid Intake: Please note that directly after your heart operation, the heart is often bruised and stiff, and it usually takes around one month to six weeks for your heart to truly recover. During this time, it is of particular importance to watch your fluid intake. We are not overly concerned about what you drink (except for sugar containing drinks in diabetics) but are more concerned about your total fluid intake. This should be limited to no more than 2.5L per day. Drinking more than this, may cause your feet or legs to swell; despite having being prescribed a 'water tablet' upon discharge. Remember, that if your feet are swollen, then your inner organs may be swollen too and this may cause undue strain on your heart and lungs.

Appetite & Diet: One usually will not have much of an appetite for food for the first month to six weeks after the operation. This is normal and to be expected. Likewise, it will take about one month to six weeks for your taste buds and taste for food to recover. During this time, food will often taste bland or tasteless. Do not worry. This will recover in due course. However, it is important that you continue to eat small regular meals so that your body is provided with the energy that it needs to heal and repair itself. We worry less in this time frame about what you eat (barring sugars in our diabetic patients) and more that you do eat. If you still struggle with the thought of eating, then please get Ensure from your local pharmacy to supplement your diet and energy requirements in the interim until your appetite recovers. The dietician will schedule an appointment with you and your spouse, prior to discharge, to discuss an individualised healthy eating plan with your specific needs and goals in mind. Remember: life is always a balance between disease prevention and enjoying life; so everything in moderation.

Alcohol: It is best to avoid alcohol during the first six weeks of your recovery as even a small amount of alcohol may cause you to become quickly intoxicated.

Exercise: It is vitally important that you continue to exercise as has been demonstrated in hospital. While it may initially feel like you have run the Comrades every time that you walk to the bathroom, your heart is like any muscle in the body and it needs to be exercised for good health. So twice daily, you should go for a nice long walk or climb stairs to continuously improve your effort tolerance. The length of the walk should be gradually increased every week until you are comfortably walking 1km in a session by the end of the first month. The aim is to push yourself; but not to the point that you are feeling dizzy or faint. In addition, it is vitally important that you continue to exercise with your spirometer to prevent chest infections and improve your lung capacity.

Rest: Your recovery period should entail a healthy balance between rest and exercise. In the beginning, you may often require both a morning and an afternoon nap; in addition to sleeping through the night. But this too will pass as your body recovers. If you are having sleeping difficulties though, please contact the rooms, as your regular sleep-wake cycle may have been disturbed by your stay in the ICU and it may be necessary to prescribe a sleeping tablet to restore a normal sleep pattern.

Work: You will be booked off work for the first six weeks after the operation as you will need this time for your body to heal. A sick-note will be given to you during your follow up appointment; once we have re-assessed your health. For the first month upon return to work though, you will be booked on light duty as you will still need to be protective over your chest bone and may often feel exhausted by the end of a half days work. This is no need for concern, and life will return to normal by the end of the first three months after the operation.

Mental Health: It is quite normal for one to become markedly depressed upon return to home; as one struggles to grapple with what could have been, and with the gravity of the operation that you have been through. It is for this reason that you are routinely prescribed an anti-depressant upon discharge from hospital; to see you through the darker days. Likewise, your concentration span and mental acuity will be initially impaired. This will improve along with your general recovery. However, if you are still struggling to come to terms with things, please schedule an appointment with Dr Leah Pearson, our preferred Psychologist, to assist you in your mental recovery.

Follow Up: Please schedule a follow up appointment with the rooms to see Dr Davidson again in three to four weeks post discharge. It is important that he sees you again before you run out of medication.

**Please do not mix your old medication with your new script;
but stick strictly to the prescription given to you upon discharge.**



Dr Murray Davidson

Specialist Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Website: www.drdaavidson.co.za

Glynnwood Email: glynnwood@drdaavidson.co.za

Glynnwood Tel No.: (011) 420 1065

Arwyp Email: arwyp@drdaavidson.co.za

Arwyp Tel No.: (011) 922 1083