

**MORRISTON HOSPITAL  
NHS TRUST**

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**DISCHARGE INFORMATION  
FOR  
CARDIAC PATIENTS**

**THIS BOOKLET  
WAS  
WRITTEN BY THE  
NURSING & PHYSIOTHERAPY  
STAFF  
ON THE CYRIL EVANS WARD  
MORRISTON.  
TO WHICH OUR GRATEFUL THANKS IS GIVEN**

**INTRODUCTION TO DISCHARGE BOOKLET**

**WELL DONE!!!**

By now you will have had your heart surgery and will be well on the way to recovery and looking forward to being discharged home. A full recovery will take some time and during this period you may experience many mixed emotions.

As you return to normal you may feel some excitement at the prospect of being able to resume many activities that you have been unable to do for some time, but you may also feel nervous for fear of undoing the good work done by surgery. You may feel apprehensive as you leave the security of the hospital. The staff of Cyril Evans Ward understands this and want to reassure you that once you are discharged home you will not be left to cope on your own.

This comprehensive booklet contains information for you to read at your leisure. It covers many topics that you will find useful and informative once you are home. If you require further help or cannot find the information in the booklet then there is a 24hour help line on the Cyril Evans Ward where trained nurses will be able to advise you. If they are unable to sort out your enquiry then they will speak to other members of the team and call you back



**GOING HOME FROM HOSPITAL**

You will be ready to go home anytime between 5 – 7 days following your surgery. Do not worry if you are sent home before or after this time as people recover at varying speeds

During the first two weeks at home we strongly suggest that there is someone there with you constantly. Hopefully you will have this information from pre-admission clinic or from the booklet we sent to you. If there is no one who can stay with you, please inform your primary nurse as soon as possible so we can make alternative arrangements for you, otherwise your discharge could be delayed.

Now that you have had your surgery there is no reason why your quality of life cannot be much improved allowing you to return to a more active life than you previously experienced. It is normal to feel apprehensive and insecure about leaving hospital and it may take a few days to settle down at home. Many patients and their families have enormous build up to their surgery and may experience a sense of anti-climax once it is all over. Your partner or family may feel anxious about taking you home, this is perfectly normal, but show them this booklet so they can see what you are allowed to do.

During your recovery period you will have good and bad days and may experience a wide range of emotional and physical symptoms. This is all part of the natural recovery process following heart surgery and although it may take time, these feelings will pass. Here are some of the symptoms you may experience; you may only be affected by a few of these, as everyone is different

### **SOME EFFECTS OF HEART SURGERY**

- **Strange taste in your mouth, food tastes awful**
- **Blurred vision, dots in front of your eyes, moving walls. We advise you not to have your eyes tested for at least 8 weeks following your surgery, to allow this to settle down**
- **Hearing seems muffled, echo inside your head.**
- **Difficulty in concentrating, more forgetful than usual.**
- **Profuse sweating, feeling very cold.**
- **Hoarse or lost voice, voice sounds different, lump in throat.**
- **Sore or numb bottom.**
- **Constipation.**
- **Crying and mood swings or feeling irritable.**

**These side effects are natural part of the recovery process following heart surgery and will disappear with time**

### **HEALTHY EATING ADVICE**

You may find that it takes a few weeks for your appetite to return to normal and you may not feel like eating very much. Try eating small meals regularly instead of large meals. Your food may also taste strange but this will pass with time.

Generally, the British population eats far too much fat particularly animal fat, rather than eating protein, fibre or carbohydrates. Reducing this intake you can help to prevent any further problems with your heart in the future. These are some general guidelines to follow to keep you and your heart healthy:

- **Keep to a low fat diet, choose leaner cuts of meat and remove all visible fat. Reduce the amount of red meat in your diet, eat more turkey and chicken (skinless)**
- **Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre. Cereals and wholemeal or granary bread.**
- **Reduce the amount of sugar you take.**
- **Reduce the amount of salt you use – use herbs and spices instead.**
- **It is important to drink plenty of fluids, 2-3pints daily is reasonable, if you suffer from constipation this intake should be higher.**

Try using semi-skimmed or skimmed milk. Use low fat spread or margarine high in polyunsaturated fat and low fat cheeses. Avoid fried foods, cream and pastry. Try to eat plenty of boiled rice, pasta (in low fat sauces) and fish, especially oily fish that is rich in omega 3 oil.

If you need further advice on your dietary requirements then please ask the nursing staff prior to discharge who can arrange for you to speak to a dietician or contact your G.P. who can help you.

### **PAIN**

For most heart operations the breastbone (Sternum) is divided and therefore will take a number of weeks to heal properly. During this time (up to 6 – 8 weeks, longer in some cases) it is common to experience aches and pains in the chest. When you leave hospital you will be given 7 days supply of painkillers, which will help relieve the pain. It is important to continue taking these painkillers to enable you to increase your level of activity. Once this supply has finished, paracetamol, which can be obtained from your local chemist, can be taken for pain relief. If you do need to carry on taking the odd dose after 8 weeks this is perfectly normal. However, if the paracetamol is ineffective you may need to consult your G.P. for stronger pain killing tablets.

Other ways that may help to relieve pain are: -

- Making yourself a cough cushion or using a folded towel to support your wound when you cough or, take a deep breath.
- Using 2 – 3 pillows in bed, these will act as a lever to help you sit up. Gripping the bed linen to assist you raising yourself up out of bed will also help. It is often easier to roll on to your side and then push off the bed with your elbows.
- Using a high backed armchair with armrests minimises the effort needed to push yourself up from a low-lying unsupported settee/sofa.
- A daily bath or shower will help reduce muscle stiffness and general aches
- Gentle massage of aching muscles

### **HYGIENE**

You are able to shower or bath (preferably a shower initially) once your wound is dry and healing. Avoid using perfumed bath oil or rubbing soap into the wound to begin with and do not use talc. Extreme temperatures of hot and cold should be avoided while gently washing around the wound site. You may require assistance initially to get in and out of the bath or find it helpful to sit on a chair or stool when in the shower. Loose comfortable clothing may be easier to wear until your wound is healed.

### **DENTAL HYGIENE**

If you have had valve surgery, or have congenital heart disease it is important to keep your teeth and gums healthy and infection free. Bacteria can enter your bloodstream and cause an infection of the inner lining of your heart, a condition known as endocarditis. It is therefore important to have regular checks with your dentist, even if you have dentures, as these can be ill fitting, particularly if you have lost weight, and cause problems. If you have any dental work carried out, or any other investigative procedures or treatment that involve introducing equipment into you, then your dentist or doctor must give you antibiotics prior to the treatment. Nursing staff on the ward will give you information regarding this antibiotic treatment prior to going home.

### **STRESS**

Stress is a part of everyday life and a certain amount is necessary to keep us healthy. However too much stress can turn into distress and we begin to feel that we can no longer cope.

There are no right or wrong answers in dealing with stress. However it is important to recognise when you are feeling very stressed and try/avoid those things, which cause you stress. Some ideas that may help: -

- To become aware of being stressed (e.g. hunched shoulders, gritted teeth, gripped fist, feeling anxious).
- Work off your stress, or get away from what is causing it.
- Participate in relaxing activities.
- Plan time each day for yourself.
- Make sure you take regular exercise, gradually increasing your level of activity

### **WOUND CARE**

The stitches in your chest and leg wounds are just underneath the skin and you will not be able to see them. They are soluble and will not need to be removed. Do not be afraid to wet the wounds. A daily bath or shower will keep them clean and encourage wound healing. Initially you should avoid using perfumed bath salts or oils and do not rub soap directly into the wound area until it is well healed, avoid using talc.

You may notice a lump or swelling at the top of the chest wound. This is quite normal and should gradually disappear over several weeks. Until the edges of the breastbone unite you may be aware of a slight clicking noise in the chest, particularly when moving your arms. If this is a new phenomenon then you should ring the advice line and let us know, however if you had this clicking sensation upon discharge from the hospital then you do not need to ring us unless the clicking gets worse.

If you are a diabetic it may take longer for your wounds to heal.

If you develop a temperature or notice any redness, tenderness or discharging around the wound site, or severe swelling accompanied by pain in the calf muscle, consult your GP. Who will prescribe the appropriate treatment or refer you back to us if necessary.

If you have had a vein taken from your leg you may notice swelling in that leg, particularly around the ankle. You will be given support stockings to wear, which will help to reduce the swelling.

Resting your feet up on a stool or chair when sitting down will also be beneficial. The stockings should be worn for at least 2 weeks after you leave hospital. If swelling persists and the stockings are helping then you may continue to wear them until the swelling subsides. Wash these daily with mild detergent; they can be washed in a washing machine. You may take them off at night when you are at home.

### **ALCOHOL**

Alcohol in moderation is permitted. The Health Education Council recommends a maximum of 14 units per week for women and 21 units for men. One unit is equivalent to a pint of normal strength beer or lager, 1 glass of wine = 140mls or one pub measure of spirits. Try to have a couple of days each week free from alcohol.

Alcohol should not be taken with strong painkillers. If you are taking warfarin only small amounts of alcohol (2 units per day) are permitted, as alcohol enhances the effect of warfarin.

### **SMOKING**

It is well known that smoking damages the lungs, however smoking also;

- Increases the thickness of the blood and increases the risk of a heart attack.
- Acts as a stimulant increasing the heart rate and the blood pressure, which puts strain on the heart.
- Causes blood vessels to become smaller and reduced in size and this reduces blood flow to the heart.
- It also speeds up the process of 'furring' of the arteries, and if you continue to smoke you can block up your new grafts!!

**YOU MUST STOP SMOKING!!!!**

## **RESUMING SEXUAL RELATIONS**

This is a topic many people find very hard to talk about, but it is a natural part of life and should be considered accordingly.

After a heart operation people can have fears in case something they do will undo the work that surgery has done. Some people may think that the exertion of intercourse is similar to climbing two flights of stairs, so providing your fitness level can cope with this amount of activity, then you should be fine. Try to choose a comfortable position to begin with, one that does not put too much pressure on your chest a less active role is preferable. Do not be afraid to discuss your fears with your partner, you will find that they are often just as anxious as you.

Until you return to normal, experiment a little, keep what simple pleasures can be enjoyed until you both get confidence back again. Massage, stroking, caressing and kissing can all increase intimacy without causing extra strain or sore wounds. If you do experience breathlessness or pain during sex, then stop and relax, as you would do with any other form of exercise. Consult your GP if the symptoms are severe and do not so away after 15 minutes.

## **DRIVING**

Driving should not be resumed until about six weeks following surgery and until you have been declared medically fit to drive. This is because your concentration will be poor and chest discomfort will prevent you from driving safely. **YOU ARE NOT EXEMPT** from wearing your seat belts and they must be worn at all times. You may find a pad or cushion between your chest and the seat belt more comfortable. It is important that you inform your car insurance company that you have had cardiac surgery as it may invalidate your policy if you don't and will avoid problems with any claims you may make in the future. If you have any problems with them, then there is a list of insurance companies (published by the British Heart Foundation) who are sympathetic to people with heart problems.

If you hold an **LGV, PCV or HGV** licence, then you will need to inform the **DVLA** who will advise you further. This does not mean that you will be unable to drive again. You will be required to have a medical or an exercise test before getting your licence back. This is usually done 3 months after your operation. You will also need to discuss the situation with your employers to find out what their requirements are for you to return to work as a driver. The same rules apply to train drivers and pilots.

## **RETURNING TO WORK**

There are many factors, which influence when you can return to work. You should discuss these with your GP and with your doctor when you have your out-patient appointment at the hospital. Many people return to work after approximately 3 months sometimes sooner. This will depend on your recovery and nature of your job. In some cases it may be necessary to changing your job (or even retiring). Involve your family and GP in discussing options.

## **TABLETS**

When you leave hospital you will be given 7 days supply of tablets and will therefore need to see your GP within the first few days at home to arrange a further supply. You will also receive a letter to give to your doctor that lists all the tablets you are taking and the dosages. Remember to take this with you to the surgery. Before leaving hospital make sure you understand the tablets you are taking and the length of time you need to continue them, as this will have changed from the medication you took prior to your operation. If you are unsure about this discuss it with the nursing staff or pharmacist prior to discharge.

Once you are at home, if you have any questions about your tablets or medicines, then you are welcome to ring the pharmacy during working hours or the ward at any time on:

**Cyril Evans Ward 01792 704132 Or 704133**

**Pharmacy help line 01792 703366 Monday – Friday, 9am to 5pm Saturday 9am – 12 midday.**

## **SLEEP AND REST**

To begin with you will probably feel weak, and may find that you tire fairly quickly. Take care to build things up gradually, rest after lunch is a good idea but do not sleep too much in the day as you may not sleep at night. Try to get a balance between overdoing things and over protection by well meaning family and friends. You may need to limit the number of visitors you have when you first go home and may find that it takes some time for you to get back to normal sleeping patterns. Here are some tips to help you get a better night sleep:

- Try to get some fresh air and follow your exercise programme so that you feel physically tired at night.
- Aim to sleep mostly at night, taking only a short nap in the afternoon if necessary.
- Take a warm bath or shower before going to bed.
- Take your painkillers if you think you need to.
- Have a warm milky drink prior to going to bed.
- Avoid tea, coffee and alcohol in the evening.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Following your operation, every effort will be made to help you resume a normal healthy life as quickly as possible. During your hospital stay you will receive some information about your individual rehabilitation needs and how to recover after discharge.

During the first couple of weeks at home, you may receive a visit from a cardiac specialist nurse health visitor or a British Heart Foundation Nurse (depending upon the service available in your local area). She or he will check your progress and provide you with further information and support during the early stages of your recovery.

Approximately 8 weeks after your operation you will receive an invitation to a hospital or community based Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme near to your home. Cardiac Rehabilitation is considered to be an important part of your treatment and is seen as the completion of your care package. It usually involves attending 1 –2 sessions a week over a period of 6 – 8 weeks.

The aim of the Cardiac Rehabilitation is to promote your recovery by encouraging physical activity aiming to gradually improve your general fitness. It includes health education about how to manage your coronary risk factors and support to make lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation, stress management, dietary advice and weight management. Most rehabilitation programmes cover three components: -

- Exercise regime tailored to your ability.
- Relaxation techniques.
- Education on risk factors for heart disease and lifestyles

Attending a Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme can help give you the confidence to become active again and gives you the opportunity to ask questions and talk about any worries you may still have.

People who have attended Cardiac Rehabilitation say one of the main benefits is that they feel more confident about coping with everyday life. They find the exercise helps them increase their fitness level and highlights any limitations they may have and how to deal with them. They also enjoy the chance to meet with others who have shared similar experiences.

Patients are referred for Rehabilitation at their nearest hospital or community based programme (if appropriate) on discharge from Morriston. If you are not invited to a Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme following surgery, ask at your local hospital or contact Morriston Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme by telephoning:

**(01792) 704044 or 703391**

In the long term most GP surgeries around Swansea offer a coronary heart disease clinic that provides an annual review by the practice nurse; where your blood pressure, weight and blood are monitored, you will be kept up to date on the risk factors; we would advise you to attend this service. For patients outside of Swansea area please contact your local surgery for availability of this service.

### **FLYING**

If you are planning a holiday abroad, check with your surgeon in your out patients appointment (2 to 6 weeks after discharge), when it is safe for you to fly. If you have a pacemaker you are advised to inform someone at the airport to avoid the metal detectors within the archway as it may trigger off the alarms. The amount of metal from the stainless steel wires used to re-unite your breastbone, or the metal within the heart valve will not trigger the alarms on their own. However, combined with any other metal you may be carrying, it may be enough to activate the alarm systems. If you are in any doubt speak to an airport official prior to walking through the detector.

### **HOW CAN I LEAD A NORMAL LIFE**

Now that you have had your heart surgery and are going home you must have a positive outlook and take every step to enjoy a full and active life.

Here are some helpful hints to keep you healthy and prevent further problems with your heart.

- You should try never to smoke again.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Take adequate regular exercise.
- Reduce/avoid anything that causes you stress.
- Regular health checks by your GP if you have any medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

After the first 6 – 8 weeks after your op **DO NOT** lift anything more than **5 – 10 POUNDS**.

#### **AVOID:**

Carrying shopping bags, picking up babies/toddlers, pulling shop freezer doors open

After 8 weeks – light lifting can commence.

#### **NEVER:**

Try to lift very heavy objects.

Push a car.

Open a jammed window.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Weeks you should commence a Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme at you're nearest Centre

Usually by about 12 weeks you should be back to your previous level of fitness.

**REMEMBER.** Exercise should become part of your daily life now, for the rest of your life to maintain and help prevent any further heart problems.

**The list below is for guidance only. Do not worry if you feel unable to do the activities at the weeks suggested. Do things as and when you feel ready, but generally not sooner than is suggested below.**

First 2 weeks after op	Walking and exercises as shown in hospital get plenty of rest And avoid too many visitors.
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Third week after op	Light housework, light dusting, wiping dishes, setting table cooking light meals. Rest when required
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Fourth Week	Increase activity slowly to include light washing and some ironing, gentle sweeping, seated garden activities i.e. cutting, planting but avoid excessive pulling of weeds. Light social activities if you feel ready (i.e. out with friends)
Fifth Week	Increase daily activities but avoid changing bedding, lifting washing etc. Travel on public transport (if seated)
Sixth Week	Ironing, making beds, hanging out washing, light shopping, raking and light DIY. Swimming (if wounds fully healed)
Eight Week	Heavier gardening i.e. mowing, using watering can, cleaning windows, vacuuming, cycling (not hilly routes initially), bowling, putting practice, golf swing, fishing (light fishing only), & dancing.
12 weeks after your op	Golf, Badminton, Tennis, Jogging & plenty of walking.

Contact sports, such as rugby or Karate should only be commenced with your doctor's permission, very competitive or aggressive games such as squash should be avoided  
These are general guidelines only; if in doubt ask your doctor or Physiotherapist

If you become more than slightly breathless or experience any chest pain **STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND REST.** Give yourself time for your breathing to return to normal between each exercise. When you are able to cope comfortably with your exercises you may slowly progress by increasing the time or number of repetitions. For instance 30 seconds to 40 seconds, 10 repetitions to 12 repetitions and so on.

Walking on more hilly routes – try to walk uphill at the start (i.e. when you are at your freshest) and downhill on the way home.

Try to avoid your daily walk in the evening, as you will be more tired at this time of day.

Do not walk immediately after a meal or on a very, cold, windy days or icy days.

**Elderly or those suffering from other problems affecting mobility or the very unfit.**

**You will need to take things more slowly than the guidelines above, and will progress more slowly.**

### **Exercise indoors when you are unable to go for daily walks**

It is important to exercise following heart surgery to maintain (and improve) the strength of the heart muscle and improve your general fitness.

The type of exercises undertaken should be aerobic in nature i.e. involving movement of large muscle groups, such as walking, swimming, cycling.

Avoid isometric exercises i.e. weightlifting and prolonged muscle contraction against resistance.

**NEVER -**

- Lift and carry very heavy weights**
- Push a car**
- Exercise in very cold weather**
- Undertake sustained overhead work.**

You should exercise regularly. Remember to start slowly and build up your activity gradually.

During your exercise it is normal to experience:

- Slight breathlessness
- Slight sweating
- A feeling of tiredness
- Feeling your muscles working
- Increased heart rate

**However it is Not Normal to experience:**

- Chest pain.
- Sickness/nausea
- Dizziness
- Palpitations
- Excessive sweating
- Excessive shortness of breath.

If you feel any of the above you must stop the activity/exercise immediately and rest. If your symptoms do not settle – **SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE.**

Regular walking is recommended as your principal exercise to regain your fitness and to help maintain improve your fitness for the future.

The programme below is a guide only. Your Physiotherapist will advise you individually, taking into account your previous level of fitness.

Initially walk with a friend or relative, on THE FLAT. If you are too puffed to walk and talk you are doing too much. However, you may feel a little short of breath on normal response to exercise. If you overdo it on one day – rest the next day.

### **Examples of walking programme**

<b><u>Weeks after Operation</u></b>	<b><u>Distance</u></b>	<b><u>Time</u></b>
2 weeks (1 <sup>st</sup> week home)	potter around up to quarter of a mile	5 minutes
3 weeks	Quarter to half a mile	5 – 15 minutes
4 – 6 weeks	Half to one mile	15 – 40 minutes
6 – 8 weeks	One to two miles	40 – 60 minutes
8 weeks	Three to four miles	60 minutes +

Remember to use your feelings on exercise sheet.

**NB Do not walk a dog on a lead for at least 6 – 8 weeks, because of the undue strain it could cause on your chest wound (especially if it is a big dog).**

**Progress your walking programme by:**

**Increasing the distance or time (as in example above) increasing the speed of your walk (i.e. brisker pace). Incorporate hills.**

If you feel at all unwell once you are home please contact your GP who will be able to care for your needs appropriately. In certain circumstances he/she may ask you to contact us or they may do so themselves.

If you need information, re-assurance or just feel that you need to talk to someone then please ring our Cardiac Advice Line on Cyril Evans Ward

**Telephone No 01792 704132 or 01792 704 133**

At any time of the day or night. There will always be a nurse available to speak to you.

### **SUPPORT GROUP**

Following your surgery you may wish to attend a support group set up by people like yourself who have had surgery or heart disease.

In Pembrokeshire there are support groups available to both you and your family at: -  
Fishguard, Haverfordwest, Narberth & Pembroke Dock.

The meetings consist of many activities such as social events, meetings with guest speakers on various topics and they also organise exercise programmes at local leisure centres.

Many people find these groups helpful.


#### **The Fishguard Group meet at:**

The Fishguard Leisure Centre, normally meet on each Friday between 12 noon & 4.00pm


On occasions in improved weather conditions planned walks are arranged around the Fishguard Area.

Contacts are: -

**Irene Hartup (Cardiac Nurse)**

 **01437 773878 & 07770326248**

**Paula Emery (Cardiac Nurse)**

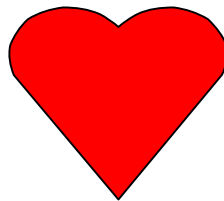
 **01437 774262 & 07775518213**

**Terrence Grover (Chairperson)**

 **01239 820607**

**E. John Palmer (Secretary)**

 **01348 872240**



**THESE NOTES  
WERE  
WRITTEN BY THE  
NURSING & PHYSIOTHERAPY  
STAFF  
ON CYRIL EVANS WARD  
MORRISTON HOSPITAL**