

Cardiac Rehabilitation

What is cardiac rehabilitation?

Cardiac rehab, as it is commonly known, is a plan of exercise and education for people who have heart problems. It helps you slowly and safely get back to normal activities. A cardiac rehab program usually lasts from 4 to 12 weeks.

Who needs cardiac rehab?

Most rehab programs are designed to help people who:

- have had a heart attack
- are recovering from heart surgery or coronary angioplasty
- have other heart problems, such as angina (chest pain) or heart failure.

Some programs help healthy people who are out of shape and at risk for heart disease.

What is a typical cardiac rehab program?

Phase 1

Phase 1 usually begins in the hospital. Exercise is started to help you recover from a heart attack or heart surgery. This usually means short walks and exercises to stretch muscles. Nurses will watch you and check your blood pressure and pulse rate before and after the exercises. You are taught about your heart disease and what you can do to stay healthy. You may need to take an exercise treadmill test before you go home from the hospital. The results of the exercise test are used to plan what your activity will be for Phase 2.

Phase 2

Phase 2 starts after you are home. It lasts about 8 weeks and averages 3 sessions a week. The amount of exercise is slowly increased. During this phase, it is common for you to start to feel more confident that you can go back to work or do other normal daily activities.

Learning about your disease is almost as important as exercise. During the stay in the hospital, most people are anxious and stressed. Both patients and their families have a hard time remembering what they have been told about the disease. During Phase 2 you will learn:

- about the disease
- how to take care of yourself
- how to avoid problems in the future.

This phase may have classes to help you learn about a healthy diet or how to stop smoking. Support groups may help you and your family deal with your illness and the lifestyle changes you need to make.

Phase 3

Phase 1 and Phase 2 give you information on being healthier, including exercising and eating right. Phase 3 is the maintenance phase. This phase helps you develop habits for a lifetime of heart health.

What are the benefits?

Cardiac rehabilitation can:

- increase your chances of surviving a heart attack or other heart problem
- increase your ability to be active and exercise
- help you return to work sooner
- help you get back to a normal lifestyle.

The program's support can help you and your family during this difficult time.

Perhaps one of the most valuable benefits of cardiac rehab is the improved quality of life. People who have been through the program report feeling healthier and happier than they did before heart disease disabled them.

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Written by Donald L. Warkentin, M.D.

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