

Back on Track

A directory of rehabilitation
services and exercise programs
for heart patients from South-Eastern
New South Wales



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The information in this booklet has been provided by the Rehabilitation professionals in each town or district in South-East NSW.

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About Heart Support Australia

Heart Support Australia is a national volunteer, not-for-profit heart patient support organisation, with over 40 branches throughout Australia. Its central objectives are:

1. to foster commitment to and create awareness of the needs of the estimated two million Australians affected by cardiovascular disease and other heart conditions, and
2. to support, inform, and encourage those people and their families.

HS-A members are people who have had direct experience of heart disease, either as patients or carers. They are trained to work collaboratively with health professionals in hospital cardiac rehabilitation units, and, wherever possible, to provide support and non-medical information to patients undergoing heart surgery or treatment. Hospital visiting is a primary activity of HSA.

This key activity has generated a commitment to establishing self-management programs and adopting nationwide information and rehabilitation initiatives for people with heart conditions. All this exemplifies HSA's motto: "Support – Information – Encouragement.", and sums up the purpose of this booklet: to help reduce the impact of heart disease and improve your health and quality of life.

You can learn more about HSA at www.heartnet.org.au. To find out about the active branches at Cowra and Canberra, just phone the national HSA Office on (02) 6280 7211.

Membership of HSA provides an opportunity for people who have had heart surgery, stents or other treatment to "give something back" to the rehabilitation system. These members benefit greatly from the companionship and understanding of others like themselves, and gain much from their volunteer endeavours and social contact in a caring environment.

Using this booklet

This directory of the rehabilitation services and other exercise programs in each town has been designed to assist the recovery of heart patients following their discharge from hospital after surgery or medical treatment.

It firstly describes the nature and benefits of Cardiac Rehabilitation, then summarises the six steps for returning to a healthy, active life.

The booklet then gives information about the hospitals and community health services in 20 south-east NSW towns that provide exercise and information programs during and after rehabilitation.

Cardiac Rehabilitation is Essential

Why should I participate in Cardiac Rehabilitation?

Cardiac Rehabilitation is about helping you return to an active and satisfying life, and preventing future heart problems. The World Health Organisation and the National Heart Foundation of Australia recommend that **ALL** patients who have heart disease should participate in a rehabilitation program of some sort.

***** If you don't change your lifestyle after a heart attack or heart surgery, it is likely that you will be back in the same or a worse state of ill health within six months of treatment. *****

Participating in a Cardiac Rehabilitation program ensures that you have a full understanding of your condition, and of the lifestyle changes needed to minimise the risk of future heart problems.

What does Cardiac Rehabilitation involve?

Cardiac Rehabilitation usually has two components. The first is physical rehabilitation in the form of appropriate, gentle exercise. This exercise assists greatly with your physical recovery after a heart attack or surgery. It also gives you the methods for continuing to improve your fitness and health after the program finishes.

The second component of rehabilitation consists of information about your condition. It generally involves various health professionals presenting and discussing heart related issues. It provides practical advice and information about your particular heart problem, how best to manage it, and the lifestyle changes you need to make to maintain and improve your health.

Another benefit of Cardiac Rehabilitation is that it allows you to meet other people with similar health problems. This can be really useful when you are feeling that no-one around you quite understands what you are experiencing, and it's a great way to get involved in new social and support networks.

6 steps to successful rehabilitation

1. Exercise

Being active can be fun, especially if you find someone to share your activities. Regular and appropriate exercise has a positive effect on all your body's systems. It makes you feel good about yourself, is known to release positive chemicals in your brain, and speeds up your physical and emotional recovery. Exercise also helps to control other risk factors of heart disease such as your weight and blood pressure. By strengthening your heart muscles, more blood is pumped throughout your body. Staying active can also ease lung conditions and arthritis.

As you may be embarking on your first more vigorous exercise program for a while, here are some tips that might be useful:-

Always check with your doctor before starting an exercise program

Find an activity that you enjoy doing

Make sure the exercises are appropriate for your fitness level and health condition

Walking is one of the cheapest and easiest forms of exercising

If possible, find an exercise partner or group

Wear comfortable and suitable shoes and clothing

Don't forget the sunscreen and hat if exercising outside

Don't exercise immediately after eating, but eat a small snack within 30 minutes of exercising

Drink plenty of fluids (especially water) before, during, and after exercise

Don't exercise if you are feeling unwell

Warm up and cool down with gentle stretches

Stop if you get light-headed, short of breath, nauseated, or have irregular heart beats or chest discomfort

Gradually work up to exercising 5-7 times a week for 30-40 minutes each time

Find an exercise partner

2. Healthy Eating

Healthy eating is beneficial to your recovery in several ways: it assists your body in the healing process, helps control your weight, prevents further clogging of your arteries by lowering your blood cholesterol level, and takes excess strain off your heart by reducing the amount of fluid retained by your body. This means your heart is not over-worked and is less likely to have problems in the future.

Getting advice from a dietitian can be especially useful. The dietitian can tailor a healthy eating plan suited to your body and your particular health issues. Meanwhile, here are some reminders of what you need to avoid, and what foods are good for you:-

AVOID

Fatty meats

Full cream dairy products, including butter

Fried take-away foods unless cooked in unsaturated vegetable oils

Commercially baked products other than grainy breads

Highly salted seasonings

Processed foods

Foods with more than 120 mg of sodium per 100g

Excess alcohol

USE

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats such as canola, sunflower and soy bean oils and spreads

Plant-based foods like grainy breads, cereals, rice, pastas, vegetables, fruits, dried peas, beans and lentils

Lean meats for protein including red meats for iron, skinless chicken, and fresh or tinned fish like sardines, tuna & salmon

3. Change of Lifestyle

After a Heart Attack or Surgery

It is perfectly normal to feel different, frustrated, irritable, depressed, overwhelmed, scared or even relieved. These feelings can go on for quite a while, but eventually you will feel you have regained control over your life.

Depression

Often occurs as a feeling of sadness on some days, but if it happens every day, ask your doctor how to get through this phase – often exercising in company with others during and after the rehabilitation course will overcome it.

Smoking

Although difficult, stopping smoking is the single biggest thing you can do to reduce the risk (by up to 50%) of further heart problems.

Social Isolation and Support

Social support during the recovery phase is essential, so seek it from family, friends, health professionals &/or community support groups.

4. Your Relationship with Your Doctor

It is recommended that you visit your GP as soon as possible after leaving Hospital. It is a good idea to make a list of questions to ask your GP or any other doctor, like when can I play sport, drive, return to work, what do my medications do and do they have side effects? Also, always carry a list of your medications.

5. Understanding your Medication

Tell your doctor about any physical or emotional side-effects of your medicines, as well as your general feeling of well-being. Many side effects can be relieved if your doctor slightly adjusts your dose, time for dosing, or changes the medication.

Follow the storage advice for medicines to avoid damage, and note 'use by' dates. Always use the prescribed doses and times. If you miss one dose, do **not** double the next dose. If doses are missed for many days, consult your doctor.

6. Attitude

A positive attitude about your condition and rehabilitation will let you recover more quickly, and also make the whole process less stressful and more enjoyable.

If you decide to look at your illness as a 'warning sign', and an opportunity to make some positive changes that increase your quality of life, the whole experience will be a lot easier. Remember that we who survive the first round of heart problems are the lucky ones! Then you can use your rehabilitation course to really learn about your condition and how to manage it successfully, so giving you the best chance of avoiding future problems.

Laughter may no longer be 'the best medicine', but it certainly helps a lot!

Some relaxation ideas: massage, walking, yoga, music, swimming, take a bath, sleep, relaxation tapes, Tai Chi, meditation, reading and hobbies.