



# Cardiac rehabilitation

Supporting your recovery





## **A note about cardiac rehabilitation**

The Heart Foundation and the World Health Organization recommend all patients who have had a heart attack, heart surgery, coronary angioplasty, heart failure or other heart or blood vessel disease attend an appropriate cardiac rehabilitation and prevention program.

Some hospitals and community health centres run outpatient cardiac rehabilitation programs. These programs build on the gradual increase in physical activity started in hospital. Cardiac rehabilitation provides you and your family with education, information and support. You should attend a cardiac rehabilitation program as soon as possible after hospital discharge.

Attending a cardiac rehabilitation program will help most people to reduce their risk of further heart problems.



## What is cardiac rehabilitation?

Cardiac rehabilitation, or “cardiac rehab”, is a medically supervised program that helps you recover from a heart event or diagnosis. Cardiac rehab supports people who have experienced a heart attack, stent or heart surgery; as well as those who have had chest pain, heart failure or atrial fibrillation admission. Cardiac rehab services usually provide education, counselling and exercise programs to improve your health and wellbeing, and reduce the risk of future heart problems.

These programs complement the care provided by your general practitioner (GP) and/or cardiologist.

Cardiac rehab can be delivered:

- one on one, or in a group setting
- over the telephone or through a mobile application (app) or over the internet
- in hospital, a community centre, clinic or your home

If you have to stay in hospital, your cardiac rehab program may start while you are in hospital and continue when you go home.



## Who should attend cardiac rehab?

If you have or had a heart condition, you may benefit from a cardiac rehab program. Your doctor may refer you to cardiac rehab if you have or had:

- a heart attack
- coronary artery disease (CAD), angina or heart failure
- a heart procedure or surgery, such as coronary artery bypass graft (CABG), coronary angioplasty or stenting, valve replacement, or a pacemaker or implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)
- a heart rhythm problem, such as atrial fibrillation
- a cardiac arrest

Cardiac rehab can improve your overall health and may prevent future heart problems.



## What services are offered in cardiac rehab?

Cardiac rehab programs vary but usually include:

- a health professional assessment to identify your needs and help you set your recovery goals
- a tailored physical activity program; this may be in a group setting and your heart rate, and blood pressure will be monitored
- counselling and education to help you understand your condition and how to manage it, including what to do in an emergency and taking your medicines as prescribed
- education on steps you can take to reduce your risk of future heart events, such as stopping smoking, eating well, and looking after your emotional health
- support and training to help you return to your normal activities and to help you learn to manage your heart condition

Each member of your cardiac rehab team will talk with you and work to help you recover more quickly and reduce your risk of future heart problems.

Everyone has a different recovery journey, so your team will assess your individual needs to create a personalised cardiac rehab program that suits you.

In the long term, members of your team will continue to work with you, assess your progress and change your program as you recover.



**Regular physical activity is not just great for your heart, it also improves your strength and energy levels, and can help improve your mood and emotional health.**



## What are the benefits of cardiac rehab?

Regular physical activity improves your strength and energy levels, and can help improve your mood and emotional health. It can also reduce your chance of future heart health problems.

The education and counselling you receive may help you stop smoking, eat well by learning to choose healthy foods, lose weight and lower your blood pressure and cholesterol. You may also learn how to manage stress and feel better about your health.

When you are in a cardiac rehab program, you will receive advice and supervision from healthcare professionals who will help you improve your health and lower your risk of future problems. These professionals can also communicate with your GP or cardiologist.

People who attend cardiac rehab mention how helpful it is to meet and talk with other people who have undergone a heart event or diagnosis.

### Norma's story

When Norma learned she'd had a heart attack, she couldn't believe it. The 50-year-old never thought she would experience coronary heart disease.

"I was in the low-risk category for everything, except my family history. My father had a heart attack 30 years ago," Norma said.

Norma had coronary angioplasty and, after discharge from hospital, she was referred to a cardiac rehabilitation program. She joined a group program that involves education, support and exercise to help in her recovery.

"I think the program is very good, because you are with other people and it is a very supportive environment," she said.



## How can I find my local cardiac rehab program?

Your hospital or GP will give you a referral to a cardiac rehab program. If you don't receive one, be sure to ask them about the cardiac rehab programs in your area.

You can search for your closest cardiac rehabilitation service in the Heart Foundation Cardiac Services Directory. Visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au/cardiac-services-directory](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/cardiac-services-directory)



## What should I consider when picking a program?

There are a number of things you should consider when picking a cardiac rehab program:

- **Time** – Choose a program that is offered at a convenient time.
- **Place** – Make sure it is in a location you can get to easily.
- **Services** – Ensure the program offers all of the services you need.
- **Setting** – Consider whether you prefer a group or individual program and where you will do most of the exercises, e.g. at home or in a facility.
- **Cost** – Ask whether the cost is covered by Medicare or your private health insurance. Some cardiac rehab services have a small extra fee per session.

## Want to know more?

For more information, call your GP. You can also visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

# Will you recognise your heart attack?



## Warning Signs Action Plan

Do you feel any

**pain**      **pressure**

**heaviness**      **tightness**

In one or more of your

**chest**      **neck**      **jaw**

**arm/s**      **back**      **shoulder/s**

You may also feel

**nauseous**      **a cold sweat**

**dizzy**      **short of breath**

Yes

**1 STOP** and rest now

**2 TALK** tell someone how you feel

### If you take angina medicine

- Take a dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Still have symptoms? Take another dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Symptoms won't go away?

Are your symptoms severe or getting worse?

or

Have your symptoms lasted 10 minutes?

Yes

**3 CALL 000** Triple Zero and chew 300mg aspirin, unless you have an allergy to aspirin or your doctor has told you not to take it

- Ask for an ambulance.
- Don't hang up.
- Wait for the operator's instructions.



For heart health information visit  
[heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

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