

Home Care After Sternotomy with Implantation of a Ventricular Assist Device (VAD) or Mechanical Circulatory Device (MCD)

This handout is a review of things you need to know about caring for yourself at home. If you have questions after you read this, please let us know.

Medicines

A pharmacist will talk with you before you are discharged about your medicines and when to take them at home.

Activity

Your doctor has advised you to follow these guidelines for **at least** 6 weeks to help your chest bone (sternum) heal. This time frame is based on how well your sternum heals.

Until you see your cardiac surgeon:

- Do not lift more than 8 pounds (A gallon of milk weighs 8 pounds).
- Do not push or pull with your arms when moving in bed and getting out of bed.
- Do not flex or extend your shoulders over 90°.
- Avoid reaching too far across your body.
- Avoid twisting or deep bending.
- Do not hold your breath during activity.
- Brace your chest when coughing or sneezing. This is vital during the first 2 weeks at home.
- No over the shoulder activity until cleared by your surgeon.
- No driving until cleared by your surgeon.
- Follow the guidelines set up by your UW Inpatient Cardiac Rehab staff.
- **If you feel any pulling or stretching in your chest, stop what**

you are doing. Do not repeat the motion that caused this feeling.

- **Report any clicking or popping noise around your chest bone to your surgeon right away.**

Wound Care

Follow directions given to you by your VAD coordinator.

- Do not shower unless approved by your VAD team.
- You **must** use the shower kit supplied by the VAD vendor to protect the electrical system of your device. Your VAD coordinator will teach you how to use this kit.
- Keep your incisions clean and dry.
- Do not put ointments, powders, or lotions on your incision.
- Check your chest tube sites, driveline, and incision line daily for signs of infection:
 - redness
 - swelling
 - tenderness
 - foul smelling drainage
 - fever
- Follow directions for the driveline dressing change.
- Keep your chest tube sites and sternal incision open to air unless they are draining. If they are draining, cover them with dry gauze when you do your daily dressing change and before you go to bed at night.
- Your chest tube sutures will be removed in 3-4 weeks at a clinic visit. Be sure this visit has been scheduled.

Pain Control

It is normal to have some incision pain.
Take your pain medicines as needed.

Call 911 if you

- Have severe shortness of breath or chest pain.
- Feel like you are going to faint or have fainted.
- Have a fast irregular heartbeat when resting for 10 minutes.

When to Call

- If your temperature is greater than 101° F.
- If you hear any clicking or popping noise around your chest bone.
- If you gain or lose more than 2-3 pounds in 1-2 days or more than 5 pounds in 1 week.
- **Any** signs of infection.

Who to Call

Cardiac Surgery Clinic:
(608) 263-1530

Monday-Friday- 8am- 5pm, call your VAD coordinator.

After hours, nights, weekends and holidays the clinic number will be answered by the paging operator. Ask for the cardiac surgery resident, VAD coordinator or Heart Failure attending on call. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

Toll free call **1-800-323-8942**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2022 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6164