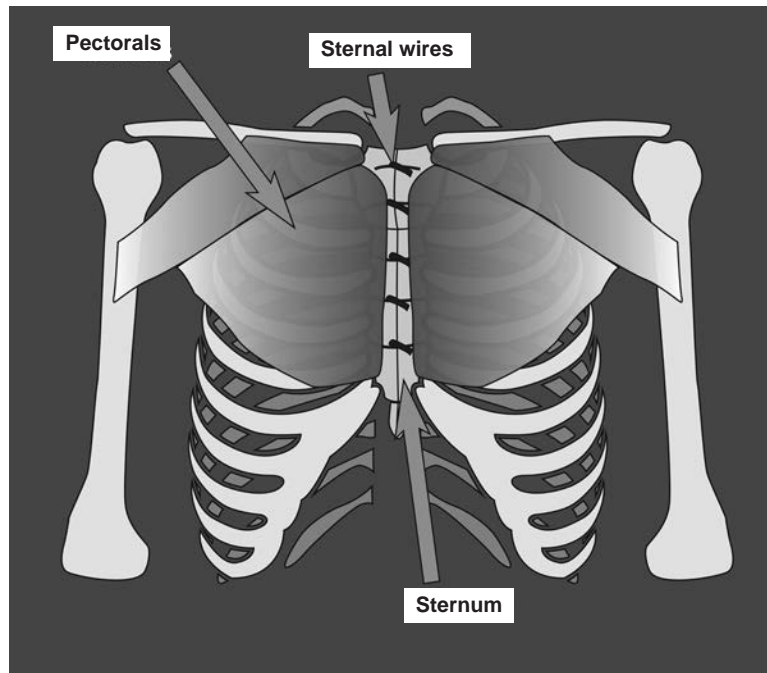


Patient/Family Material

Moving Safely After Heart Surgery



The sternum, also known as your breastbone, is the flat bone in the middle of your chest that was cut during your heart surgery. It has been put back together using steel wires. Like any other bone, it usually takes 6 – 8 weeks for your sternum to fully heal. For some people healing may take even longer. Your main chest muscles (pectorals) attach to each side of your sternum, a part of your collarbone (clavicle) and to the top part of your arms as seen in the image below. This means that using your arms or hands to support your body weight, or to push, pull, lift or carry any weight puts stress over your healing sternum and may cause you pain.



Moving your arms

As soon as you are awake from your surgery, you can move your arms in any direction as your comfort level allows. Moving your arms and your shoulders will help prevent joint stiffness.

Movement zones for arm activities

As you heal, you will move through three zones for arm activity. There is **no set time** to be in each zone. There will be times throughout your day when some of your movements are in zone 1 while others are in zone 3. For example, you will be able to reach for your cup on the bedside table (zone 3 activity) while in hospital, but, to lift a 4 liter milk jug at home, you will need to be in zone 1 as the jug is heavier than the cup. Depending on the weight of the object you are holding or wanting to move, you will change back and forth from Zone 1 to 3 many times throughout your day.

EVERYDAY, with all activity in ANY zone. You should:

- feel comfortable
- have no increase in discomfort or pain at your sternum.



No matter what zone you are in, **Listen to your body!** Move your arms closer to your body (Zone 1) if you feel uncomfortable performing an activity with your arms away from your body (Zone 2 or 3).

Moving forward through the Zones

- Start any new activity in Zone 1 to see how it feels before moving your arms farther away.
- If you feel well with a certain activity, you may try to increase the weight of the objects you are moving or move your arms farther away from you (from Zone 1 to 2 to 3) until the movement is back to your normal.
- Slowly increase the amount of weight you are moving in all positions until you are able to complete all of your daily tasks that you were doing before surgery.
- Any heavy lifting, even once your sternum is healed should always be done in Zone 1.

Remember: Weight is anything that you lift, push, pull or carry and includes your own body weight when you are getting up or changing position.

Pain? What do I do?

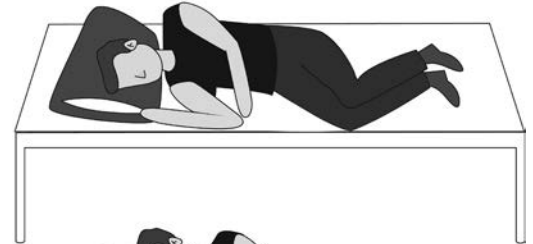
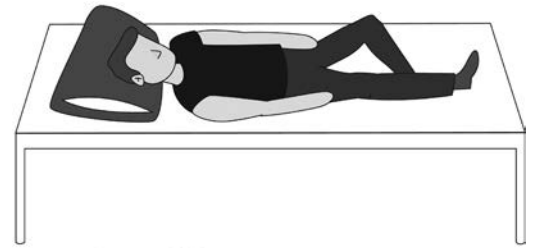
Some discomfort after heart surgery is normal and should improve every day. If you have an increase in discomfort or pain, follow these tips:

- If your **pain** increases with movement, bring your **arms closer to your body** or **lighten the weight**. (For example, move from Zone 2 back to Zone 1)
- **STOP** and let your care provider know if you have an **increase in discomfort or pain** with any movement when **your arms are close** to your body with **no weight**.
- At times, you may hear or feel a **clicking** at your sternum. If so, **STOP the activity that made the clicking happen**. If the clicking does not stop, make sure to tell your doctor what movements make the clicking occur.
- Once at home, if you have increased pain with activity in Zone 1 with no weight or if you are having ongoing clicking at the sternum, contact the **Cardiac Surgery Post-Operative Clinic at 204-258-1258 (Monday – Friday 7:30 – 15:30 hours)**.

How to move and protect your sternum

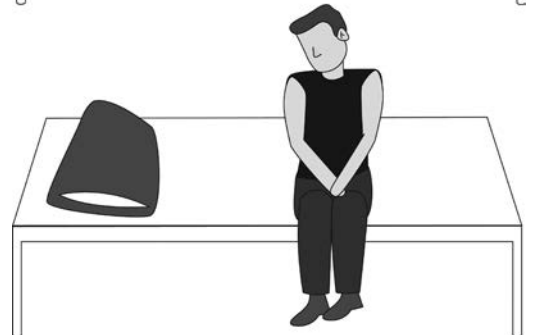
Getting out of bed

- While lying on your back, bend your knee up and place your foot firmly on the bed.
- Roll onto your side by pushing with the bent leg and reaching across your body with your arm.
- Stay on your side and bring both legs over the edge of the bed.
- Hook your legs on the bed and push up evenly with your bottom elbow and your top hand to sit up.
- To move to the front of the bed shift your weight from side to side and “walk” your hips forward. If needed, you can use your hands by placing them next to your body to push from side to side to help move.



Getting in to bed

- Sit on the side of the bed.
- Lean down on your elbow and shoulder closest to the head of the bed. Put your other hand on the mattress in front of your body to steady yourself.
- Stay on your side as you lift both legs up onto the bed; now roll onto your back.



Repositioning in bed

- To straighten out, bend your knees and place your hands on the bed next to your body. Push into the bed with your feet, hands and upper body and lift your hips up off the mattress. Move your hips over to straighten your body into a comfortable position.

Sitting down

- Back up to the chair or bed so that you can feel it on the back of your legs. Lean forward as if you are bowing, bend your knees and sit.
- As you sit down, you can take weight equally with both hands onto the chair seat (not the arm rests) directly next to your bottom.

To move forward in a chair (scoot forward)

- Lean back and push against the chair, sliding your bottom forward.
- **Or** Shift your weight from side to side and “walk” your hips forward. If needed, you can use your hands by placing them next to your body to push from side to side to help move.
- Use the arm rests **only** if you have no increase in discomfort or pain.

Standing up

- Scoot to the front of the chair (follow directions above) so your feet are flat on the floor with your knees bent and feet underneath you.
- Stand up using your leg power. You can push with your arms to help as long as you push evenly through both hands on the surface right next to your bottom.

TIP: Rocking your upper body back and forth a few times gives you momentum and makes it easier to stand up. Aim to get your nose over your toes.

- If you are using a walker, reach for it after you are safely standing.

Your healthcare team will ensure you are safe and able to get in and out of bed, up and down from a chair as well as walk on your own after surgery. If you have any questions about returning to a specific activity, or how to move safely, please ask your **Physiotherapist**.

Daily life at home

Once you are home, you will slowly build up your activity. Each person heals at their own pace. Some people will keep their arms next to their bodies with movement longer than others. The best way to build up your activity level is to slowly increase your activity as your body allows. Your healing sternum and incisions, fatigue, swelling, pain and other medical conditions you may have, impact your return back to normal life. It is important to listen to your body and recover at your own pace.

Caring for yourself

- You may care for yourself after your surgery. Something you may find more difficult is reaching behind your back (example: putting on a bra or coat) as the motion may put stress on your sternum. If there is an increase in discomfort or pain, change how you do these activities (example: doing up the bra clasp in front of your chest or wearing a looser coat). If an activity is painful, even with your arms next to your body, you will have to avoid it (example: getting in/out of the tub) until you have healed more.

Caring for your Home

- You may resume your household chores as long as they do not cause or increase pain to your sternum. If an activity causes you an increase in discomfort or pain, try to do them in a different way, lighten the load or you may have to avoid them all together. For example, begin by only folding laundry. As you recover you may then carry the laundry basket with your arms close to your body.

If you or your family has concerns about how you will function once you are home or you are finding it hard to care for yourself in hospital, you may have an **Occupational Therapy** assessment to assist with planning for your discharge.

Final words on Safe Activity:

- Ask for help if you need it.
- Use good posture to save energy.
- Plan your day and your week to include time for rest.
- Try to use your legs as much as possible when lifting, pushing or pulling to avoid stressing your healing sternum.
- Get close to the object you want to move/lift.
- Always start in Zone 1 and move back to Zone 1 if the activity doesn't feel right.
- Keep in mind as you heal, **listen to your body and let pain be your guide.**