

# Life After a Heart Attack

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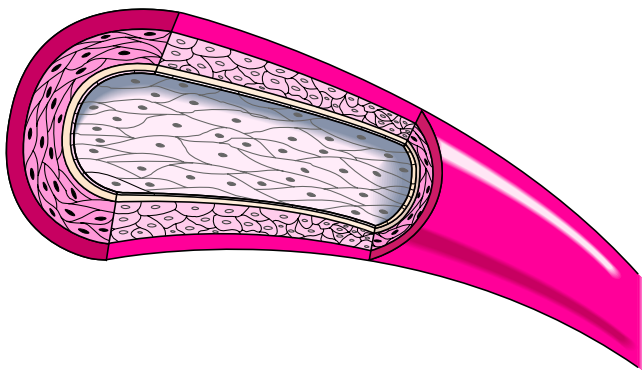
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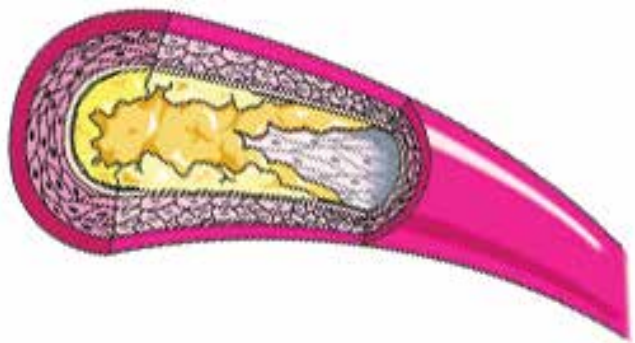
- As you recover, your heart is healing every day. You and your support persons may have questions. This pamphlet explains what happens when you have a heart attack and how you can help yourself. It will not answer all of your questions.
- You may want to write down any questions you have as you read. There is space for notes and questions at the end of this pamphlet. Your health care team will answer any questions you or your support persons may have.
- Ask your health care team for other pamphlets that may help you.
- Tell your health care team if you have any suggestions for this pamphlet.
- Take this pamphlet with you to appointments with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) after you leave the hospital.

## What happened to my heart?

- You had a heart attack. This is also called a myocardial infarction.
- The blood vessels that bring blood and oxygen to your heart muscle are called coronary arteries. They can become blocked (the space inside them gets smaller) by cholesterol (a type of fat found in your blood) that builds up over time. This is called atherosclerosis or coronary artery disease.
- If one or more of your arteries is blocked, blood cannot flow through.

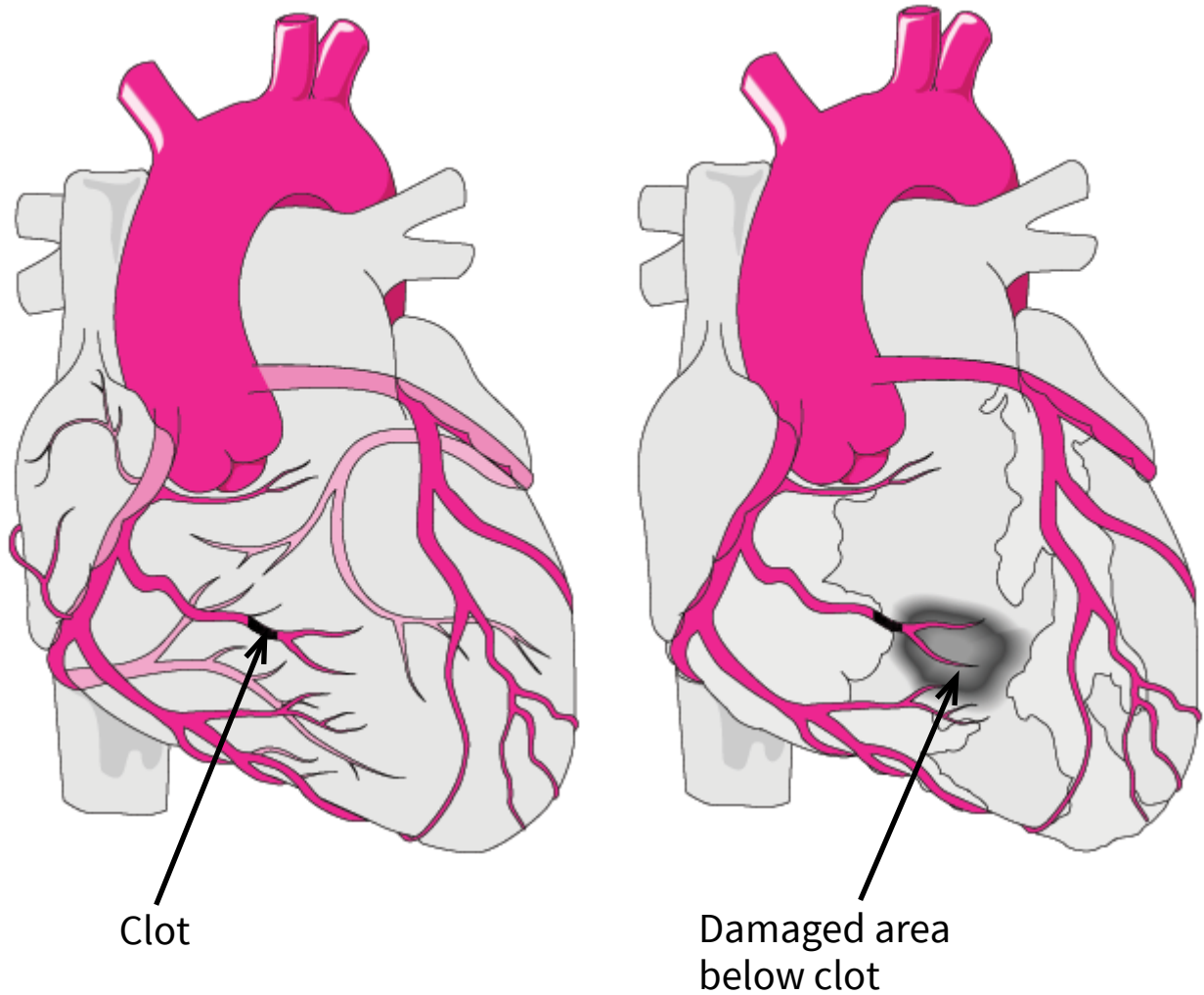


Normal artery - blood flows through easily



Narrowed artery - blood has trouble getting through

- A heart attack is when the narrowed part of a coronary artery is blocked by a blood clot.
- When the artery is blocked, the blood stops flowing through that artery and your heart cannot get enough oxygen. Without oxygen, this part of your heart can be damaged. This is what causes pain or discomfort during a heart attack.
- The amount of damage to your heart depends on where the blood flow was blocked.
- Scar tissue will form on the damaged part of your heart over the next 6 to 8 weeks after your heart attack.



## What are the symptoms of a heart attack?

You may have had some of these symptoms:

- Chest pain or chest discomfort: People describe this in different ways. It can feel like:
  - › Squeezing, pressure, or heaviness in your chest
  - › A feeling of tightness, like a band around your chest
  - › A crushing feeling in your chest
  - › A burning feeling (like heartburn) in your chest that may move to your shoulder, arms, neck, jaw, or back
- Hot or cold sweats
- Shortness of breath (trouble breathing)
- Feeling weak or very tired
- Fainting
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- A burning feeling in your chest or a feeling like indigestion

**If you have any of these symptoms while you are in the hospital, tell your nurse right away.**

## What is the difference between a heart attack and angina?

- **Angina** is chest pain or discomfort caused by the heart muscle not getting enough oxygen for a short time (usually less than half an hour [30 minutes]). It does not damage the heart muscle. The most common treatment is nitroglycerin (also called nitro spray). Nitro spray makes your coronary arteries open wider. This lets more blood pass through them. Angina is usually relieved by rest and up to 3 nitro sprays taken 5 minutes apart. Angina is a warning sign to take better care of your heart.
- A **heart attack** causes permanent (it does not go away) damage to the heart muscle. Symptoms usually last for **more than half an hour**. A heart attack cannot be relieved by rest and nitro spray. **You must get treatment for a heart attack at the nearest hospital right away.**

## What activities can I do while I am in the hospital?

You will do more activity over time. Your health care team will tell you how to move through these steps.

Step	Activity	Bathroom	Bathing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bed rest</li><li>• Range of motion exercises</li></ul>	Use a portable toilet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Someone will help you bathe</li><li>• You may wash your face and hands</li></ul>
2	Sit up in a chair, as able	Walk to the bathroom, if it is in your room	Bathe at your bedside
3	Walk around the room, as able, walk in the hall on the unit, supervised	Walk to the bathroom on the unit	Bathe in the bathroom
4	Walk in the hall on the unit alone, as able	Walk to the bathroom on the unit	Bathe in the bathroom

## What if I have chest pain or discomfort while I am in the hospital?

- Lay down in bed and **call your nurse right away.**
- If you are walking in the hall, sit down and ask someone else to call your nurse.
- **Do not take nitro spray unless your nurse tells you to.**
- Your nurse will:
  - › give you oxygen, if needed.
  - › check your blood pressure.
  - › give you nitro spray, if needed.
- Your cardiologist (heart doctor) may want you to have an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG). These are tests to record the electrical activity of your heart.

## What are my risk factors for heart disease?

A risk factor is anything that makes your chance of having a heart attack higher. Some risk factors are more serious than others.

You can prevent or control some risk factors. This can make your health better and lower your chance of having a heart attack.

### Risk factors that you cannot control:

#### Family history

- You are more likely to have heart disease if you have either:
  - › A close male relative (father, uncle, grandfather) who had heart disease before age 55
  - › A close female relative (mother, aunt, grandmother) who had heart disease before age 65
- Some families are more likely to have heart disease than others. If you have a family history of heart disease, try to lower any other risk factors you may have.
- It is important for all of your family members to lower their risk factors. They should talk to their primary health care providers about this.

#### Age

- You are more likely to have a heart attack if you are:
  - › A male over age 45
  - › A female over age 55

#### Sex

- Males are more likely than females to have a heart attack.

### Risk factors you can do something about:

- › Smoking
- › High blood pressure (hypertension)
- › Diabetes
- › High blood cholesterol
- › Being overweight
- › Stress
- › Drinking too much alcohol
- › Not getting enough exercise

Ask your health care team about the risk factors that affect you and your family.



## How can I lower my risk factors for heart disease?

### Stop using tobacco

- **This is the most important thing you can do to lower your risk of having another heart attack.**
- Tobacco narrows your blood vessels and makes your heart work harder. Breathing in second-hand smoke also makes your risk of developing heart disease much higher, even if you do not smoke.
- **You have a 50% higher chance of having another heart attack if you keep using tobacco.**
- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can make it 2 times more likely that you will be able to quit smoking.
- If you or your family member need help to stop smoking, call Tobacco Free Nova Scotia or talk to your primary health care provider.

### Tobacco Free Nova Scotia

- Tobacco Free Nova Scotia can connect you with free programs and resources to help you stop smoking.
  - › Phone: 811
  - › <https://tobaccofree.novascotia.ca>

### Control high blood pressure

- Blood pressure is the force your blood puts on your artery walls as it moves through your arteries. High blood pressure is when there is extra pressure. This makes your heart work harder.
- To help control your blood pressure:
  - › **Do not smoke**
  - › Use less salt
  - › Check your blood pressure often
  - › Take your medications, as told
  - › Manage stress
  - › Keep a healthy weight
  - › Drink less alcohol
  - › Stay active

Ask your health care provider what your blood pressure should be.

## **Control diabetes**

- If you have diabetes:
  - › Keep your blood sugar as close to normal as possible.
  - › Your hemoglobin A1C should be less than 7. Talk to your primary health care provider for ways to help you reach this goal.
  - › Exercise, follow your eating plan, and take medication, as told.

## **Diabetes Centres**

- There are Diabetes Centres across the province that your primary health care provider can refer you to.
- These centres provide education and work with you and your primary health care provider to help you manage your diabetes.

## **Control high blood cholesterol**

- Before your heart attack, a health care provider may have told you that your cholesterol level was normal.
- Now that you have had a heart attack, your cardiologist may want you to lower your cholesterol level. Ask your cardiologist about the best level for you.

## **Keep a healthy weight**

- If you are overweight, losing some weight may lower your blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels. It may also help control your blood sugar.
- Healthy eating and being active can help you reach or keep a healthy weight. Talk to your primary health care provider:
  - › before starting an exercise program.
  - › about safe, healthy ways to lose weight.

## **Manage stress**

- Stress happens when you feel that the demands of life are more than you can handle (see “How can I manage my feelings and stress?” on page 17).

## Limit alcohol

- Drinking too much alcohol affects your kidneys and makes your arteries stiff, which can raise your blood pressure.
- It can also cause high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.
- **If you drink alcohol, limit the amount.**
  - › **Males should not have more than 2 drinks per day.**
  - › **Females should not have more than 1 drink per day.**
- Count your drinks:
  - › 1 drink of beer equals one, 12 ounce serving (one 355 ml bottle).
  - › 1 drink of wine equals one, 4 ounce serving.
  - › 1 drink of hard liquor (like whisky, vodka, rum, or gin) equals one, 1 ounce serving.
- Ask your health care provider how much alcohol is OK for you.
- Alcohol can also affect how some medications work. **If you are taking medications, or over-the-counter products, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist before drinking alcohol.**

## Exercise

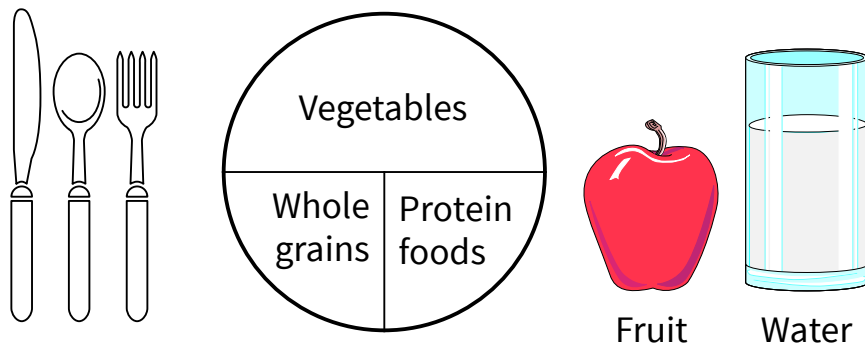
- Regular exercise helps your heart get stronger and work better. It can also help control or lower your risk factors for heart disease, like:
  - › High blood pressure
  - › Stress
  - › Diabetes
  - › Being overweight
  - › High cholesterol
  - › Not being active
- Over time, your fitness levels will improve, and you will be able to do activities more easily. It can help you have less symptoms (like angina and shortness of breath).

## Heart healthy eating

- Healthy eating can:
  - › help you feel good.
  - › give you energy.
  - › lower your risk of heart disease by helping you to control your weight, lower your cholesterol levels, and control high blood pressure.
  - › help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

## What is a heart healthy eating plan?

- Follow Canada's Food Guide to help with food choices and eating habits.
- Eat regular, balanced meals and choose a mix of foods from each food group every day.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Fill half of your plate with vegetables.
- Choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar, and salt. Make at least half of your grain products whole grain.
- Drink skim or 1% milk and choose lower fat milk options.
- Choose lean meats prepared with little or no added fat or salt.



## Eat lots of fibre

- Fibre is the part of food that is not digested. It helps to:
  - › control cholesterol.
  - › keep you full.
  - › control your blood sugar (if you have diabetes).
- Foods high in fibre include:
  - › Vegetables
  - › Fruits
  - › Legumes (like dried or canned beans, lentils, chickpeas)
  - › Whole grains and cereals (like whole wheat, whole grain oats)

- Eat vegetables and fruits at every meal. They are also a great low-fat snack.
- Eat lots of whole vegetables and fruits. Good choices are fresh, frozen, or canned (with no salt).
- **Do not** drink fruit juice. It has too much sugar.
- Eat whole grain breads and cereals more often. For example, replace white bread and low fibre cereals with whole grain breads and cereals.
- To check if a food is whole grain, look at the ingredient list.
- The first ingredient in the list should have the words “whole grain”, followed by the type of grain, like:
  - › Whole grain oats
  - › Whole grain barley
  - › Whole wheat
- Use dried peas, beans, and lentils in your meals. The fibre in these foods may help lower your blood cholesterol levels.
- Eat more fibre over time. This will help you avoid gas, bloating, and diarrhea (loose, watery poop).

## Protein foods

- Eat different protein foods, like:
  - › Eggs
  - › Poultry (like chicken, turkey) and lean meats
  - › Nuts and seeds
  - › Fish and shellfish
  - › Low-fat dairy products
  - › Beans, peas, and lentils
  - › Soy products and tofu
- You **do not** need to eat a lot of protein foods to meet your needs.
- Make about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate protein foods.
- Try to eat at least 2 to 3 servings of fish a week (like salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout, or herring).
- Eat a meatless meal at least 2 times a week. Try split pea soup, meatless chili, lentil soup, or hummus.
- Legumes, lentils, and tofu are great sources of low-fat protein.

## Salt

- **Do not** eat more than 2300 mg of sodium (salt) a day, if possible.
- To lower salt:
  - › **Do not** use the saltshaker at the table.
  - › Try salt-free spice blends (like Mrs. Dash<sup>®</sup> Salt-Free or McCormick's<sup>®</sup> No Salt Added Blends).
  - › Cook your own meals more often. Restaurant and take-out meals are often very high in salt.
  - › Limit processed meats (like bologna, bacon, and deli meat).
  - › Limit processed foods, salty snacks, canned soups, and frozen dinners.
  - › **Do not** use salt in cooking or baking, if possible. Use only very small amounts of salt (¼ tsp), if needed.
  - › Choose canned foods with labels that say “no added salt” or “low sodium”.
  - › Rinse canned foods well with water before using.
- Remember, these salts have the same amount of sodium as table salt:
  - › Sea salt
  - › Pink Himalayan salt
  - › Kosher salt

## Fat

- You need to eat **some** fat, but you need to be careful about the type and how much you eat. **Do not** eat too much fat.

### Saturated fats

- Limit the amount of saturated fats that you eat.
- These foods are high in saturated fat:
  - › Butter
  - › Lard
  - › Drippings from cooking meat
  - › Coconut oil
  - › Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils

## Unsaturated fats

- Eat fewer high fat foods, like:
  - › Potato chips
  - › Fried foods
  - › Processed meats
  - › Gravies
  - › Cream-based sauces
  - › Fatty cuts of meat
- Choose more of these unsaturated fats, like:
  - › Canola oil
  - › Olive oil
  - › Avocado oil
  - › Non-hydrogenated margarine
- Choose low-fat dairy foods, like:
  - › Skim or 1% milk
  - › Low-fat yogurt
  - › Cheese with less than 10% M.F. (milk fat)
- To cut down on extra fat in your foods, cook your food by:
  - › Grilling
  - › Baking
  - › Broiling
  - › Steaming
  - › Poaching
  - › Boiling
  - › Barbecuing
- Choose low fat cuts of meat. Cut off any extra fat.

## Omega-3 fatty acids

- Omega-3 fatty acids are healthy fats that can help to lower your risk of heart disease.
- The best sources of omega-3 fatty acids are fatty fish like:
  - › Salmon
  - › Mackerel
  - › Fresh herring and trout
  - › Sardines (packed in water)
- The best plant sources of omega-3 fatty acids are:
  - › Canola oil
  - › Soybean oil
  - › Flaxseed oil
  - › Ground flax
  - › Walnuts
- **Eating foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids is the best way to get omega-3 fatty acids.**
- Omega-3 supplements are also available. **Talk to your primary health care provider or pharmacist before you take these supplements.**

## **Limit sugar, candy, pop, and sweet desserts**

- Sugary foods and drinks are high in calories and can cause weight gain.
- **Do not** add sugar to tea or coffee.
- **Do not** eat sugary breakfast cereals. Try oatmeal with fruit instead.
- Limit desserts.
- Your taste for sweetness will change over time.
- If you eat sweet desserts, limit the amount.
- Some foods that are high in sugar can also be high in trans-fat (a type of saturated fat) and other saturated fats. Check for trans fat and saturated fats in:
  - › Muffins
  - › Cakes
  - › Biscuits

## **Limit caffeine**

- The link between caffeine and heart disease is still being studied.
- It is OK to have 1 to 2 cups of coffee a day.

## **Drink water**

- Choose water instead of pop, diet pop, sport drinks, energy drinks, chocolate milk, or juice.

## **Food labels**

- Learning to read food labels can help you make healthy eating choices. Food labels can tell you:
  - › Ingredients
  - › Serving size
  - › Amount of protein, fibre, sugar, and fat (and what types of fat) in a serving
- Compare food labels to choose products that have less saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and sodium.



## Ingredient list

- Ingredients on food labels are listed in order of their amounts. A food has more of the ingredients at the beginning of the list than the ingredients at the end of the list.
- Eat fewer, or avoid, foods that:
  - › list a fat as the first ingredient.
  - › list many fats and oils in the ingredients.

## Nutrition facts

- This part of the food label gives the serving size and nutrition information.
- Look at the serving size.
  - › Try to choose foods with a % Daily Value (DV) of less than 5% for sodium and fat (in the amount that you are eating).
  - › **Do not** eat foods with more than 15% DV for sodium and total fat.
  - › Choose foods with more than 15% DV for fibre.
  - › Choose foods with 0 grams of trans fats.

## Eating out

- Choose foods carefully when eating out. Restaurant and take-out foods can be very high in salt and fat.
- Choose a restaurant that cooks food in many ways, not just fried.
- Ask how foods are cooked.
  - › “**Crispy**” often means deep fried.
  - › **Pan-fried** or **sautéed** means cooked in fat.
- Order smaller portions or share with a friend.
- Ask for gravies, sauces, or salad dressings on the side and use only a little.
- Sauces like béchamel, béarnaise, and hollandaise have a lot of fat. Ask for light salad dressing and use only a small amount.

- Watch for fat in salads.
  - › Caesar salad and salad items (like chicken salad, potato salad, and pasta salad) are high in fat.
  - › If you add chicken or seafood to a salad, make sure it is grilled or baked instead of fried.
- If you eat out for one of your meals, have low-fat, low-salt foods for the rest of the day.

## **Food resources**

Examples of heart healthy eating plans include:

### **DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet**

- A DASH diet has:
  - › Low-fat or no-fat dairy products
  - › Low salt
  - › Lots of fruits and vegetables
  - › Low fat

### **Mediterranean diet**

- A Mediterranean diet has:
  - › Lots of vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains
  - › Not a lot of meat
  - › Fish
  - › Low-fat dairy products
  - › Healthy oils (like olive oil)

Cookbooks can help you add variety to your meals. Any cookbook by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Dietitians of Canada, or the Canadian Diabetes Association has good information. You can find these books in most libraries and bookstores.

## For heart healthy recipes, visit:

- **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada**
  - › [www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/recipes](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/recipes)
- **Cookspiration**
  - › [www.cookspiration.com](http://www.cookspiration.com)
- **Pulses: Dry Peas, Beans, Lentils and Chickpeas**
  - › <http://pulses.org/nap/pulse-recipes>
- **Better with Beans**
  - › <http://ontariobbeans.on.ca>
  - › [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)
- **Diabetes Canada**
  - › [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)

## To learn more about heart healthy eating, ask for these pamphlets:

- *DASH: Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension*
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1158.pdf](http://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1158.pdf)
- *Heart Healthy Eating Tips*
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/0524.pdf](http://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/0524.pdf)
- *Heart Healthy, Sodium Restricted Guidelines: 1500 to 2000 mg sodium per day*
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1166.pdf](http://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1166.pdf)

## Stress

- Stress is a feeling you get when you think the demands of life are more than you can handle.
- Stress can happen in situations that are frustrating or negative, as well as with positive or welcome changes.
- Things that cause stress are called stressors. Some stressors are:
  - › Money problems
  - › Health problems
  - › Waiting in line
  - › Sitting in traffic
  - › Losing your keys
  - › Changing your daily routine
  - › Adjusting to the birth or adoption of a child
  - › Change in relationship status
  - › Change in employment status (taking on a new role at work, losing a job, or starting a new job)

## **What are the symptoms of too much stress?**

- Everyone has different symptoms of stress, like:
  - › Tense muscles
  - › Headaches
  - › Trouble sleeping
  - › Trouble concentrating
  - › Getting frustrated easily
- It is common to feel upset about having a heart problem. You and your family may have strong feelings that last for weeks after your heart attack. You may
  - › feel sad or helpless.
  - › worry that you cannot help your family, job, or community in the ways that you could before your heart attack.
  - › worry about your future.
- These feelings usually go away on their own.
- Talk to your primary health care provider if you have these symptoms for 8 weeks (2 months) or longer after your heart attack:
  - › You feel sad or depressed.
  - › You lose or gain weight without trying.
  - › You sleep too little or too much.

## **How can I manage my feelings and stress?**

- Ask your primary health care provider or your loved ones for ways to manage stress. You can also try the mental health resources on page 36.
- Taking care of your health can help you handle stress better.
- It is important to:
  - › take your medication as told by your doctor or pharmacist.
  - › eat balanced, healthy meals.
  - › exercise regularly.
  - › get enough sleep.
  - › stop smoking (see contact information for Tobacco Free Nova Scotia's stop smoking programs on page 6).
  - › limit alcohol.

## How active can I be at home?

- Being active is important for good health and your recovery.
- At home, you can keep doing all the activities you did in the hospital (like bathing, dressing, and walking). You may still need help with these activities when you first go home.
- **To get back to your usual routine safely, it is important to:**
  - › **slowly** go back to your usual level of activity.
  - › balance rest and activity.
  - › avoid doing too much, too soon.
- To save your energy, try to:
  - › pace yourself (**do not** do an activity so fast that you cannot finish it, or you are exhausted when you finish).
  - › stop before you become too tired.
  - › rest between tasks or activities.
  - › find easier ways to do things. This will help you avoid getting too tired.
  - › learn your limits (how long you can do something or how much you can do). If you want to build up your limits, do it over time.

## Exercises

- These exercises will help your heart heal.
- **Follow the instructions. Do not try to do more, or do things faster, than the instructions.**
- This will give your heart the time it needs to heal.
- Remember to balance rest and activity.
- Listen to your body.
- Remember that moving your body should feel good. If you feel short of breath, slow down. You must be able to talk comfortably while you are active. If you cannot, you need to slow down.
- Strenuous (hard) activities have a higher risk of causing another heart attack if you have had a heart attack before. Talk to your cardiologist before doing activities like:
  - › Shoveling
  - › Scuba diving
  - › Playing contact sports (like hockey, football, rugby)
  - › High-altitude activities (like mountain climbing, skydiving)

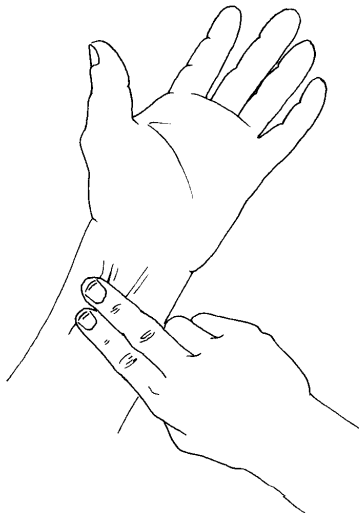
- For 4 weeks (1 month) after your heart attack, do not do activities with your arms above your heart (like hammering or washing walls) for long periods of time. These activities take a lot of energy and are very hard on your heart.

## Checking your heart rate (pulse)

- Check your heart rate when you do an activity for the first time. Keep checking it until you feel comfortable doing the activity.
- Your heart rate should not go up by more than 5 beats in 15 seconds.

### To check your heart rate:

- Do this 2 times:
  - › once while you are resting
  - › once while you are exercising.
- Practice while you are resting.
  - › Make sure you can see a watch or a clock with a second hand, or use a timer.
  - › Using your first 2 fingers, find your pulse, either on the side of your wrist closest to your thumb, or on your neck beside your Adam's apple.
  - › Count your pulse for 15 seconds. This is your resting 15-second pulse.



## **Warning signs that you are doing too much**

Stop and rest if you have any of these symptoms while doing an activity:

- › Pain, tightness, or discomfort in your chest, jaw, arms, neck, or back
- › Feeling lightheaded, dizzy, confused, or sick
- › Trouble catching your breath
- › Irregular heartbeat
- › Sweating more than usual

When you start the activity again, do it more slowly and gently.

**Call your primary health care provider if you have the following symptoms after you exercise:**

- › Strange pain or discomfort in your muscles or joints
- › Feeling more tired than you expect

**It is very important to:**

- › know these warning signs.
- › be able to recognize the symptoms of a heart attack (see page 3).

Talk to your primary health care provider if you are having these symptoms often.

**What are your questions?**

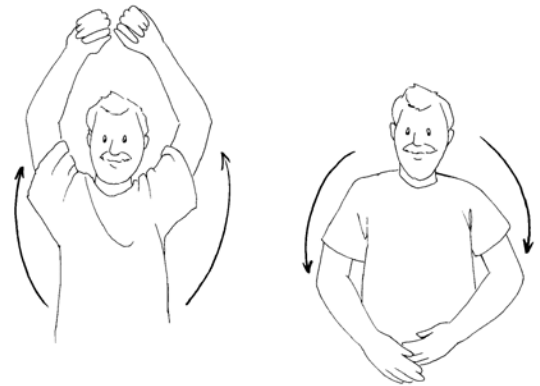
**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## Stretching exercises

- These exercises will help you:
  - › warm up before you exercise.
  - › cool down after you exercise.
  - › lower stiffness you may have from bed rest.
  - › move more easily.
- You can start doing these stretches as soon as you go home.
- **Do not** hold your breath while doing these stretches.
- Sit on a firm chair with a straight back and no arms. Repeat each stretch 3 to 5 times.

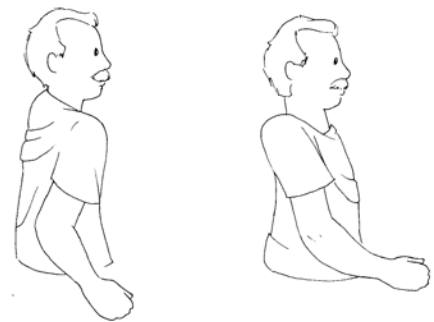
### 1. Arm lift

- Breathe in as you lift your arms up and out to the sides.
- Touch your hands together over your head.
- Breathe out as you lower your arms.



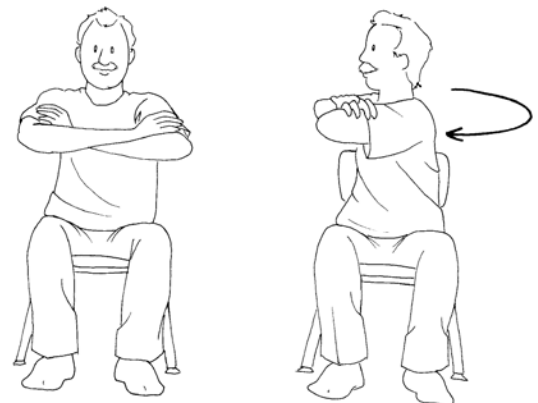
### 2. Shoulder circle

- Circle your shoulders backwards.
- Now, circle your shoulders forward.
- Repeat 5 times in each direction.



### 3. Twist

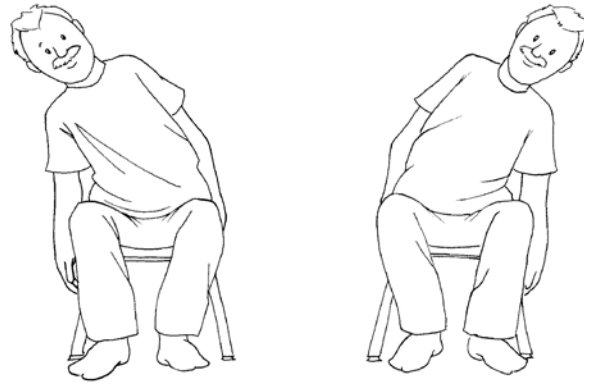
- Cross your arms in front of you.
- Twist from the waist to the right.
- Return to the centre.
- Now, twist to the left.
- Repeat 5 times for each side.





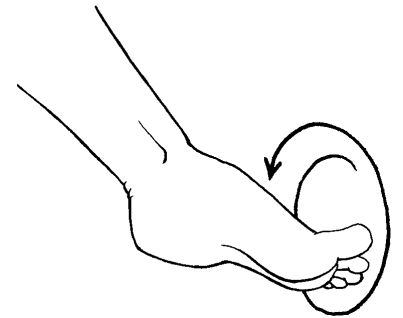
#### 4. Side stretch

- Sit up with your back straight.
- Lean slowly to one side and slide your arm down the side of the chair.
- Sit up straight. Then lean to the other side.



#### 5. Ankle pumping

- Lift one leg so your foot is slightly off the floor.
- Move your foot up and down in a pumping motion.
- Then, circle your ankle in each direction.
- Place your foot back down on the floor.
- Repeat with your other foot.



#### 6. Hamstring stretch

- Stretch one leg out in front of you.
- Reach toward your foot with both arms as far as you comfortably can. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. **Do not bounce.**
- Sit up straight and place your foot on the floor.
- Repeat with your other leg.



#### 7. Quadriceps stretch

- Slide your bottom to the left side of the chair.
- Let your left leg drop off the edge so that your knee is facing the floor. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, then come back to a sitting position.
- Repeat with your right leg.



## 8. Calf stretch

- Stand away from a wall or the back of your chair.
- Bend one leg in front of you and keep your foot flat on the floor. Keep your other leg straight behind you.
- Both heels should be on the floor.
- Slowly move your hips forward until you feel a stretch. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds. **Do not** bounce.
- Repeat with your other leg.



## Exercising at home

- Walking is the best exercise for your heart and lungs. Often, walking is the simplest way to get exercise.
- You can walk outside, in your house or apartment building, or at a mall. Do what works best for you.
- If you have problems walking, try an exercise bike, or an activity where you can go at your own pace.
- Check your pulse before you start exercising (at rest) and while you are exercising (see page 19).
- **It is important that your pulse does not go up by more than 5 beats in 15 seconds.** If it does, you are working too hard. Slow down.
- Always carry nitro spray with you (see page 29).
- Do the stretches on pages 21 to 23 of this pamphlet **before and after** you exercise. If you cannot do this, do them either before or after you exercise.
- Once you are exercising for 20 minutes, add a 5-minute warm-up and a 5-minute cool-down.

## Getting started

- Start your exercise or walking at a level that is comfortable for you.
- If you are new to exercising, start moving your body for 5 to 10 minutes, 1 or 2 times a day.

- If you were able to walk comfortably than 5 to 10 minutes while in the hospital, you can start with this amount of exercise at home.
- If you feel OK and have no warning signs that you are doing too much (see page 20), increase your exercise time by 1 to 2 minutes a day.
- Once you can exercise for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, try to exercise once a day.
- Your goal is to exercise for at least half an hour (30 minutes), 5 days a week. The time it takes to reach this goal will be different for everyone.

### **Warming up and cooling down**

- Once you are exercising for 20 minutes at a time, it is important to add a warm-up and a cool-down.
- A warm-up:
  - › gets your heart ready for the work you are about to do.
  - › makes your coronary arteries open wider. This lets your heart get more blood and oxygen.
  - › lowers your risk of muscle or joint injury.

#### **To warm up:**

- Exercise at a slower pace for the first 5 to 10 minutes of your workout.
- You may also do the stretches on pages 21 to 23.
- A cool down:
  - › lets your heart rate and blood pressure slowly return to resting levels.
  - › lowers your risk of an irregular heart beat, lightheadedness, and dizziness.

#### **To cool down:**

- Exercise at a slower pace for the last 5 to 10 minutes of your workout.
- Do the leg stretches (numbers 6, 7, and 8) on pages 22 to 23. This will lower muscle soreness and improve your flexibility.

### **Strengthening exercises**

- If you have had little or no damage to your heart, you can do strengthening exercises with light weights (up to 10 pounds).
- Wait at least 6 weeks after your heart attack and talk to your primary health care provider before doing any strengthening exercises.

## **Climbing stairs and hills**

- **Do not** walk up more than one flight of stairs at a time.
- If you have to walk up more than one flight of stairs, go slowly.
- To save energy, avoid hills for the first 4 weeks you are at home. If you go up a hill, walk slowly and stop to rest.
- Check your heart rate and how you feel the first few times you climb stairs and hills.

## **Cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program**

- The cardiac rehab program offers exercise, education, and support to help you lower your risk factors and improve your heart health.
- The cardiac rehab health care team includes:
  - › Nurses
  - › Dietitians
  - › Physiotherapists
  - › A cardiologist, as needed
- Referral to other health professionals is on an as-needed basis.
- Cardiac rehab can help you:
  - › Get more energy
  - › Improve your fitness
  - › Lower your symptoms of angina or shortness of breath
  - › Control your diabetes
  - › Control or lower your blood pressure
  - › Control or lower your blood cholesterol level
  - › Control or lower your weight
  - › Improve your flexibility and muscle strength
  - › Strengthen your bones
  - › Help you go back to work
  - › Help you stop smoking
  - › Control or lower anxiety and depression
- In cardiac rehab, you will take a one-hour exercise class 1 or 2 times a week for up to 12 weeks.
- In these classes, you will use:
  - › Treadmills
  - › Arm cycles
  - › Leg cycles
- Each class has a group warm-up and cool-down.
- Your cardiac rehab team will make a exercise program for you based on your exercise stress test, medical history, and goals.

- You may be able to do your exercise program at home or online.
- You will also have education sessions. You will learn about:
  - › Heart disease and how your heart works
  - › Risk factors for heart disease
  - › Goal setting
  - › Lowering stress
  - › Medications
  - › Nutrition
  - › Exercise
  - › Managing your weight

**Your health care team strongly recommends attending a cardiac rehab program.**

- The cardiac rehab program is offered across Nova Scotia (see pages 34 to 35).
- › If you recently had inpatient treatment for a heart-related condition at the QE II hospital in Halifax, we will refer you to a cardiac rehab program automatically.
  - › If you would like to attend cardiac rehab, please have your health care provider complete a referral for the program nearest you.

### **When can I have sex?**

- Sex takes about the same amount of energy as walking for 5 minutes and then climbing 2 flights of stairs.
- If you can walk for 5 minutes and then climb 2 flights of stairs without getting short of breath or having discomfort, it is safe for you to have sex.

### **Some common concerns are:**

- › Feeling scared that you could hurt your heart
- › Feeling less interested in sex because you feel depressed, scared, or nervous
- › Not being able to have or keep an erection because of your medications
- › Feeling anxious when you have a sexual response (like a faster heart beat and breathing, tensing of muscles)

Talk about your concerns with your health care provider.

## Tips

- Talk to your partner about your concerns.
- Find a peaceful, familiar place.
- Choose a time when you and your partner are relaxed and rested.
- **Do not** have sex right after you exercise or eat.
- Some positions may be more comfortable, like:
  - › You on the bottom
  - › Both of you lying on your sides
  - › Both of you sitting face to face

### **Do not use nitro if:**

- › you have taken sildenafil (Viagra®) or vardenafil (Levitra®) within the last 24 hours (1 day).
- › you have taken tadalafil (Cialis®) within the last 48 hours (2 days).

Taking nitro with these medications may:

- › cause a severe (very bad) drop in your blood pressure.
- › damage your heart.

## When can I go back to work?

- When you can go back to work depends on how bad your heart attack was and the type of work you do. Usually, you can go back to work after 4 weeks (1 month).
- Ask your health care provider when you can go back to work. They may ask you to have an exercise stress test before you go back to work.

## When can I drive?

- When you can drive depends on how bad your heart attack was and what treatment you had.
- Before you leave the hospital, ask your doctor when you can drive.
- If you are a taxi driver or a truck driver, the usual waiting time is 12 weeks (3 months).

## Medications

- There are many different heart medications. Most people will take a combination of these, as ordered by their cardiologist. These medications help to:
  - › lower the risk of future heart attacks and heart disease.
  - › control your symptoms or risk factors (like high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol).
- A member of your health care team will talk about your medications with you.
- You will get:
  - › pamphlets with more information about your medications.
  - › a medication calendar. This helps you know when to take your medications.

You can help prevent future heart attacks by eating healthy, exercising, quitting smoking, and taking your medications.

### Important:

- Take your medications exactly as directed.
- **Do not** stop taking your medications without talking to your primary health care provider first.
- Always carry an updated list of your medications in your wallet. It should have the name, strength, and dose (amount) of each medication you are taking. This list can help if you see a new health care provider, or if you are admitted to a hospital.
- Plan to take your medications as part of your daily routine (like at mealtimes or at bedtime).
- Check your medication calendar for times. If you miss a dose of your medication, call your pharmacist. **Never double your next dose.**
- Herbal supplements and natural products (like vitamin E, multivitamins, green tea, garlic, Chinese herbs, ginkgo) can interact with (have an effect on) your heart medications. Tell your primary health care provider or pharmacist about any over-the-counter products you use.

- Keep your medications in their original bottles or containers (unless you are filling a weekly pill box).
- **Do not** take over-the-counter medications (like cough and cold medications) without talking to your primary health care provider or pharmacist first.
- For information on programs that can help you cover the cost of your medications, see page 33. You can also talk to your primary health care provider, a nurse, or a social worker if you have any concerns.

## Nitro spray

- Nitro spray is used to relieve symptoms of angina.
- **Only use your nitro spray when you have symptoms of angina.**  
Symptoms of angina may include:
  - › Chest pain or discomfort
  - › Shortness of breath
  - › Throat tightness or fullness
  - › Jaw discomfort
  - › Arm discomfort

### These are not symptoms of angina:

- › Feeling light-headed or weak
- › Having heart palpitations (irregular heartbeat)
- › It is common to have a headache, or feel lightheaded or dizzy after taking nitro spray.
- You may find that certain activities cause chest discomfort. It may help to use nitro spray before starting these activities. It may also help to take nitro spray before an exciting or stressful event.
- **Ask your health care provider when to take nitro spray.**

### Do not use nitro spray if:

- › you have taken sildenafil (Viagra®) or vardenafil (Levitra®) within the last 24 hours.
- › you have taken tadalafil (Cialis®) within the last 48 hours.

### Taking nitro with these medications may:

- › cause a severe drop in your blood pressure.
- › damage your heart.



- If you have a new container of nitro spray, you will need to prime the pump before using it:
  - › Spray the pump 5 times into the air to prime it.
  - › Check the package instructions for any other priming directions.
- Check the expiry date on the container. Replace your nitro spray by the expiry date.

**Always carry your nitro with you.**

### **How to use nitro spray:**

1. Hold the container upright. Remove the plastic cover. **Do not** shake the container.
2. Place your finger on top of the grooved button.
3. Spray into the air until you get a mist (about 5 times).
4. Open your mouth. Bring the container as close to your mouth as possible.
5. Press the button firmly with your finger to release 1 spray onto, or under, your tongue. **Do not** inhale (breathe in) the spray.
6. Let the button go. Replace the plastic cover.

### **What if I have chest pain or discomfort at home?**

#### **At the first sign of your usual angina discomfort or chest pain:**

1. Stop what you are doing.
2. Sit or lie down.
3. Rest.
4. Spray 1 nitro spray onto, or under, your tongue.
5. Relax and wait 5 minutes.
6. If you still have chest pain or discomfort, take a second spray.
7. Wait another 5 minutes.
8. If you still have chest pain or discomfort, take a third spray.

**If your chest pain or discomfort is not gone after taking 3 nitro sprays in 15 minutes, call 911 right away. Do not drive yourself to the Emergency Department.**

- When you have chest pain or discomfort, your heart is telling you that it is not getting enough oxygen. The longer your heart muscle goes without enough oxygen, the more damaged it can get.
- The paramedics will start treating your chest pain as soon as they arrive.

**While you are using nitro spray, do not:**

- › Eat
- › Drink
- › Smoke

**When should I go to an Emergency Department?**

**Call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department if:**

- › you have chest pain or discomfort that does not go away after taking 3 nitro sprays in 15 minutes.
- › your symptoms are different from your usual angina chest pain or discomfort.
- › the chest pain or discomfort comes back in a few hours.

**Do not drive yourself to the hospital.**

## **When should I see my primary health care provider?**

- See your primary health care provider within 7 days of leaving the hospital.
- Give them the report from the hospital cardiologist. This report has information about your hospital stay and the care plan they recommended.
- Talk to your primary health care provider if you have:
  - › A fast heartbeat or your heart is missing a lot of beats
  - › Weight gain of 3 pounds in 2 days, or 5 pounds in 7 days
  - › Swelling in your legs and feet
  - › Sweating and weakness and you do not know why
  - › Chest pain or discomfort that happens more often, lasts longer, or is stronger than usual
  - › Chest pain or discomfort that does not go away with the usual amount of nitro spray
  - › Chest pain or discomfort at rest

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

## Resources

- This list was up-to-date when the pamphlet was written, but some programs may have been added and others may have been cancelled.
- You may need a referral from your primary health care provider to attend some of these programs.

## Social worker

- A social worker can help you and your family cope with the stress and decisions that can come with being sick in the hospital.
- They can also tell you about resources and services that can help you during your recovery.
- If you want to talk to a social worker, tell your nurse.

## Social workers in private practice:

Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

- › Phone: 902-429-7799
- › <http://nscsw.org>

## Nova Scotia Pharmacare Programs

- These programs help you pay for prescription medications and devices.
- The programs you can access will depend on your family situation and your family income.
- To apply:
  - › Phone: 902-429-6565
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-544-6191
  - › <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/pharmacare>

## **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada**

Learn about cardiac rehabilitation, education, and support programs near you.

- Nova Scotia
  - › Phone: 902-423-7530
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-473-4636
- Prince Edward Island
  - › Phone: 902-892-7441
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-473-4636
- New Brunswick
  - › Phone: 506-634-1620
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-663-3600
- Newfoundland and Labrador
  - › Phone: 709-753-8521
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-473-4636

## **Cardiac rehabilitation programs**

- Call the cardiac rehabilitation program closest to you or visit:
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/content/cardiac-rehabilitation-program](http://www.nshealth.ca/content/cardiac-rehabilitation-program)

## **Antigonish, Guysborough, and Richmond Strait area Community Cardiovascular Hearts in Motion**

- › Phone: 902-863-7192 or 902-863-7193
- › Fax: 1-902-863-7194

## **Bridgewater South Shore Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Program**

- › Phone: 902-527-2417
- › Fax: 902-543-8895

## **Sydney Heart and Lung Wellness Centre**

- › Phone: 902-563-8566
- › Fax: 902-563-8572

## **Halifax, Dartmouth, and Lower Sackville Hearts and Health in Motion**

- › Phone: 902-473-3846
- › Fax: 902-473-7855

## **Kentville, Annapolis, and Kings County Extended Warranty II Valley Cardiac Rehab Program**

- › Phone: 902 679-2657, then dial 2621
- › Fax: 902 678-5423

## **New Glasgow One Door Chronic Disease Management Centre Cardiac Rehab Program**

- › Phone: 902-752-7600, then dial 4700

## **Truro Cardiac Maintenance Education Program**

- › Phone: 902-893-5528
- › Fax: 902-893-3713

## **Yarmouth Cardiac Rehabilitation Program**

- › Phone: 902-742-3542, then dial 1460
- › Fax: 902-742-5170

## **Quit smoking programs**

### **Tobacco Free Nova Scotia**

- › Phone: 811
- › <https://tobaccofree.novascotia.ca>

## **Mental health resources**

### **Canadian Mental Health Association – Nova Scotia Division**

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-877-466-6606
- › <http://novascotia.cmha.ca>

### **Self-Help Connection (self-help groups)**

- › Phone: 902-453-2011
- › <http://selfhelpconnection.ca>

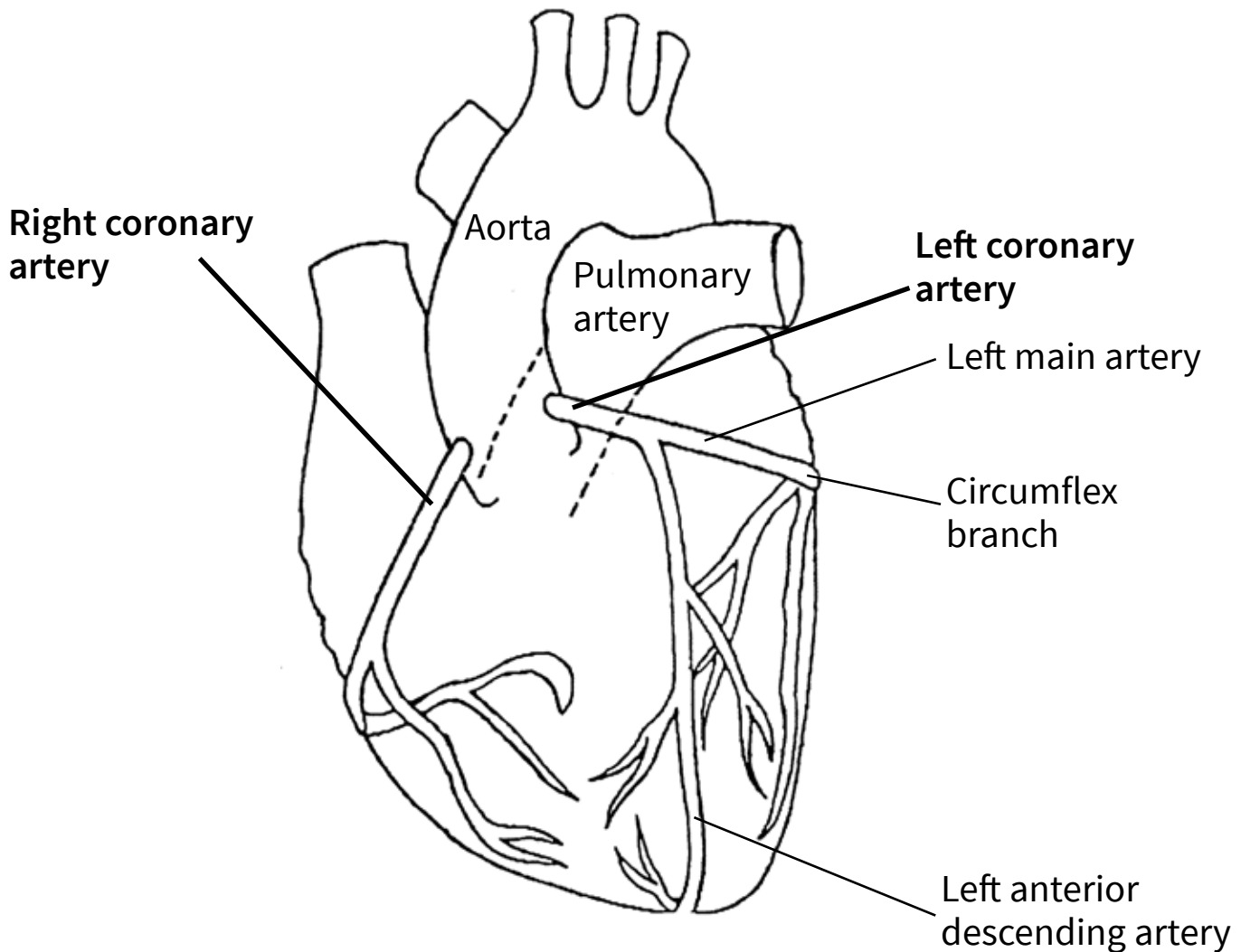
### **Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia**

- › Phone: 902-422-9183
- › [www.apns.ca](http://www.apns.ca)

### **For more information:**

- Nova Scotia 211 helps people access community and social services.
  - › Phone: 211
  - › Text: 211
  - › <https://ns.211.ca>

## Coronary arteries (main arteries of the heart)



### Important

- Avoid smoking and second-hand smoke.
- Gradually get more active.
- Take all prescribed medications exactly as ordered by your health care providers.
- **Do not** stop taking any medications unless your primary health care provider tells you to.
- Order more medications before you run out.
- Follow the Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide guidelines:
  - › [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php)





## Notes:

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:  
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

