

Sex After a Heart Attack

Is it OK to have sex after a heart attack?

After you have had a heart attack you may leave the hospital concerned about overdoing it. You may be worried about having sex. You may fear that sex will cause another heart attack or even death. Many couples mistakenly believe sex is risky and avoid it. Research has shown that sex puts less of a strain on the heart than most people think. Most couples can safely have sex without any problems for the heart.

Many people who have had heart attacks are treated with medicine or surgery and then return to normal lives. But in the days just after a heart attack occurs, your physical activities may be restricted. You may be told to avoid straining on the toilet, and you may be given stool softeners to reduce the need to strain. In the hospital, activities such as walking are watched closely. You may also think you need to avoid holding or caressing because you think these activities may lead to sex. These fears may strain your relationship and affect how you feel about yourself.

Sex is a normal and healthy part of relationships and is often important to how you feel about yourself. To avoid needless fear and worry, ask your healthcare provider about sex after a heart attack before you leave the hospital.

How will I know what level of activity is safe for me?

You may have an exercise test before or shortly after you leave the hospital. This test helps determine a safe level of activity for you. Sexual intercourse is considered to be mild to moderate exercise. Most people can safely resume sexual activity as soon as they leave the hospital. In some cases, your provider may advise a delay until you are stronger.

What if I feel chest pain during sex?

Angina is discomfort in the chest that occurs when the heart is not getting enough oxygen. It is usually caused by exertion. Angina may be felt in the upper chest under the breastbone and may travel down the left arm. It may be felt in the jaw, back, or neck instead of the chest. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to prevent. If you have chest pain during sex, talk with your provider about it. Changing your medicine may solve the problem.

Will the medicine I'm taking affect my ability to enjoy sex?

Many medicines (such as those used to treat high blood pressure or heart problems) can lower your interest in sex or affect your sexual performance. Men may have trouble having erections. Both men and women may have trouble having orgasms. Tell your healthcare provider if you notice changes in your interest in or enjoyment of sex after starting a new drug or changing the dosage.

Your provider can change your prescription, which may fix the problem. Don't wait too long for things to get better, and don't be embarrassed to ask questions.

Don't use medicines to treat erectile dysfunction, such as Viagra, unless you discuss it with your provider first. Taking an ED drug such as Viagra while you are taking nitrate medicines for chest pain could cause you to get dizzy, faint, or even have a heart attack or stroke.

What can I do to feel more comfortable about having sex?

To help you feel more comfortable about sex after a heart attack:

- Talk to your healthcare provider about it.
- Talk to your sexual partner about fears or concerns.
- Don't have sex right after a heavy meal.
- Try to have sex only when you feel rested.
- See a counselor. Counseling may help you and your partner know what to expect and feel less afraid.

For more information about heart disease and sexuality, contact cardiac support groups in your region or:

- The American Heart Association
1-800-242-8721
<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>

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