

Cardiac Rehab

A cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program helps you get better after a heart attack, heart surgery, a cardiac catheter lab procedure, or diagnosis of heart disease.

What is cardiac rehab?

Cardiac rehab is a personalized treatment plan that is provided by qualified exercise physiologists/therapists. It uses supervised exercise, education, and support to help you build a stronger heart and improve your daily life. Here's how:



In the hospital: Cardiac rehab therapists start your rehab process by helping you sit up, walk, do basic exercises, and learn how to take care of yourself at home. They will also:

- Assess your strength and balance to make sure it is safe for you to go home
- Help you to understand what your limitations may be during your recovery



At an outpatient center: You can do cardiac rehab near where you live. Most patients go 2 to 3 times each week for several months, or longer.



What do I need to do next?

- 1 Learn how a cardiac rehab program can help me. Read this page and [page 2](#).
- 2 Talk to my doctor about rehab and how to sign up for an initial evaluation. Use [page 3](#) to make notes.
- 3 Go to my first rehab visit. Take [page 4](#) with you to get started.

Good communication is key to your cardiac program success. Cardiac rehab staff regularly communicate with your doctor, who can read notes about your progress in the electronic health record. Your doctor will also get alerts from the rehab staff if you have any problems with exercise.

In addition, you get to share your thoughts about the program and help your rehab staff make it better. Be sure to talk to the rehab staff anytime you have questions and concerns.



Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower your blood pressure • Better control your cholesterol and blood sugar • Lose weight or stay at a healthy weight • Build strength • Improve fitness and energy levels • Feel better about yourself • Lower your emotional stress • Improve circulation in arms, hands, legs, and feet 	<p>Cardiac rehab is designed to be safe, and complications are rare. However, cardiac rehab can affect your heart in unexpected ways. Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abnormal heartbeat or blood pressure • Limited heart function • Chest pain • Heart attack or cardiac arrest <p>If you have a health emergency during a cardiac rehab session, our staff will be there to help you.</p>	<p>Alternatives can be different for each person. Talk to your doctor about the resources you need for education, support, and exercise.</p>



"Outpatient cardiac rehab is a fun, positive place where we all work on our health and fitness." — Joe H.

What happens at cardiac rehab?

The cardiac rehab staff may do several tests to learn more about your condition. They will work with you to create a plan for **exercise, education, and support** that is right for your situation. The plan will tell you how often to go to the rehab center, how to add activity to your daily routine, and what kind of exercises to do at home.

Exercise

As you exercise, cardiac rehab staff will help you figure out how hard you need to exercise. They will use a cardiac telemetry monitor to watch your heart rhythm and make sure what you are doing is safe. They will track your progress and watch your blood pressure, blood oxygen, weight, and exercise ability. You will learn how to:

- **Measure your exertion** (effort) and the energy you need during exercise
- **Safely exercise by focusing on:**
 - **Warm-up and cool-down exercises** so you don't stress your heart, lungs, and muscles
 - **Aerobic exercises** (walking on a treadmill, riding an exercise bike) to make your heart pump faster and your lungs work harder
 - **Strength training** to build muscle strength, lower your chance of injuries, and help keep your heart from working so hard
 - **Balance and coordination exercises** for strength and flexibility and to help reduce pain, stiffness, and stress on your joints

Education

During your cardiac rehab program, you will learn to:

- **Track your exercise progress** using tools to measure how much effort your exercise takes and how short of breath you feel while you are exercising or doing other tasks.
- **Make healthier food choices** to improve your health and reduce your risk of future heart problems. For individual diet concerns, you can meet with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN).
- **Handle stress and improve your emotional health** to know when you are stressed and how to relieve it.
- **Learn other ways** to improve your heart health by:
 - **Making small changes in your daily habits** to help better control your blood pressure, diabetes, or heart failure.

- **Quitting tobacco.** If you smoke, learn strategies to help you quit for good. Connect with support groups and classes so you aren't going it alone. Ask your doctor for Intermountain's booklet:



Quitting Tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom.

Support

Heart disease can affect your whole life. Cardiac rehab staff support you by helping you understand what you need to do for better health and find ways to make these changes. As you meet other patients, you can help each other reach your goals.

"In outpatient cardiac rehab, I never worry about overdoing when I exercise. I feel safe and have all the support I need."

— Mary G.



Tips for rehab program success

- **Prepare for each session.** Eat a healthy snack or light meal (such as toast with peanut butter or apple and cheese slices) about 1 hour before your session to make sure you have the energy you need.
- **(If you have diabetes) Check your blood sugar before you arrive.** Your glucose range for exercise should be 100 to 140 mg/dL. It is still safe to exercise if your blood sugar is 300 or less.
- **Keep up with your home exercise program.** Regularly doing exercise at home in addition to your cardiac rehab program will help you recover faster and improve your heart and lung health.
- **Don't overdo.** Be patient with yourself. Remember that overdoing it can be a setback in your healing process. As you gradually increase your exercise duration and intensity, you will find you can handle more.
- **Stay positive.** Adjusting to a serious health problem often takes time. You may feel depressed or anxious, lose touch with your social support system, or have to stop working for several weeks. *Take it one day at a time, and don't give up.*

My first cardiac rehab visit

My evaluation is scheduled on:

At this location:

I need to bring with me:

Page 4 of this fact sheet

Comfortable clothes

Walking or athletic shoes

Inhaler, if prescribed



My questions about cardiac rehab:

Cardiac Rehab: *Initial evaluation summary*

Bring this page with you to your first visit.

My cardiac rehab exercise goals:

1 Increase the time I spend exercising:

Today's time: _____ minutes

Goal time: _____ minutes

2 Increase how often I exercise:

_____ days per week

3 Be able to carry on a conversation as I exercise.

4 Keep cardiac symptom(s), such as angina or arm weakness, stable (or absent).

5 Follow an established home exercise program (see below).

My home exercise program:

Recommended activities for home exercise:

Increase exercise activities each week by _____ minutes.

My 4- to 6-week goal is AT LEAST 30 minutes of aerobic exercise each day.

Increase my exercise intensity.

The simplest way to check your intensity is to see whether or not you can talk or sing while you exercise. If you are too out of breath to carry on a conversation, you may need to slow down. On the other hand, if you can energetically sing a song or tell a story without pausing for some extra breaths of air, you may need to pick up the pace. Talk to your therapist to understand how hard you should be working.

Other:

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