



Vascular surgery

Recovery cheat sheet

5 lifestyle changes to consider

This list is probably nothing new, but that doesn't mean it's not important! Lifestyle factors have a huge influence on your recovery from vascular surgery as well as your risk for future vascular issues.

- 1. If you smoke, quit.** Smoking damages your heart, lungs and blood vessels, and makes it harder for your body to repair itself.
- 2. Eat a nutrient-rich, low-cholesterol diet.** Limiting the amount of trans fat, cholesterol, empty carbohydrates, added sugars and extra salt in your diet can be extremely helpful to vascular health.
- 3. Get some exercise.** While you should avoid strenuous cardiovascular exercise around the time of your surgery, talk to your doctor about gentle cardiovascular exercise that can help your heart and vascular system without putting a strain on it.
- 4. Stay hydrated.** When we are well hydrated, the heart can pump blood through the body more efficiently and reduce strain. Proper hydration is particularly important for those that have existing heart troubles or who have a higher risk of heart disease.
- 5. Manage stress.** Anxiety raises blood pressure and may further hurt your vascular health. Talk to your doctor about how to best manage your stress. They may prescribe anti-anxiety medications, or they may recommend mindful meditation.

Get some rest; give your body time to heal

With vascular surgery, as with any surgery, getting enough rest is important. Rest periods give your body the best chance of healing.

Rest both eases the strain on your vascular system and gives your body inactive time to repair.

After any vascular surgery — but especially a major vascular surgery — make sure that you get a good night's sleep each night, take a break from activities that could put a strain on your cardiovascular system, and keep your stress levels low.

Ask your spouse, family members and friends to help you, or arrange a paid caretaker to cover heavy housework, cooking and cleaning. Make arrangements to take time off from work according to your doctor's recommendations.

Procedure

Recovery tips

Arterial procedures

Aortic aneurysm repair

What to expect: Hospital stay up to one week, possibly in the ICU; incision soreness, fatigue

Recovery timeline: Resume normal activities in four to six weeks; full recovery up to three months

- Start walking right away, with a gradual increase in the distance you walk.
- Wait for three to four weeks before doing any type of strenuous activity (such as lifting heavy objects), but only after your health care provider’s approval.
- Avoid activities that may put stress on your incision. Hold a pillow against your belly when you cough or take deep breaths. This will decrease your pain.
- You may shower as usual. Pat the incision dry. Do not take a bath until your incision is completely closed.
- Ask your health care provider when you can drive again and/or return to work.

Balloon angioplasty and stenting

What to expect: Bruising, fatigue

Recovery timeline: One week

- Start walking right away, with a gradual increase in the distance you walk.
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time.
- Elevate your legs when lying down.
- Ask your health care provider how long to wait before resuming strenuous activities (such as lifting heavy objects).

Carotid endarterectomy

What to expect: Hospital stay of 24 to 48 hours; sore throat, bruising, numbness or tingling near incision

Recovery timeline: One to two weeks

- Stitches will be removed 7 to 10 days after surgery, or you may have stitches that dissolve on their own.
- You may feel more tired than usual for several weeks after surgery. You can do light activities around the house, but don't do anything strenuous for two weeks or until your health care provider says it's OK.
- You may shower and take baths as usual. Gently pat the incision dry and cover with a bandage if your clothing irritates the stitches.

Lower extremity bypass

What to expect: Hospital stay up to one week, possibly in the ICU

Recovery timeline: Four to eight weeks

- Begin walking soon after your surgery to help reduce swelling and promote healing in your incision.
- Avoid standing for long periods. Elevate your feet whenever you sit.
- Avoid driving for at least a week. Do not drive if you are taking opioid pain medication.
- Take a shower to keep your incisions clean (but be sure to thoroughly dry them by patting dry; don’t rub your incisions with a towel or washcloth).
- Learn to check your pulse in your leg and foot to ensure you have good circulation. Follow your health care provider’s instructions on how often to check these pulses.