

# Home exercise guidelines after a heart transplant

---



## Why does my child need exercise?

Your child will start regular, guided exercise in the hospital and should keep doing this at home. Exercise is important because your child may have had a low level of exercise tolerance before surgery due to heart weakness.

After surgery, exercise can help:

- Raise your child's level of fitness.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Decrease the impact of anti-rejection medicines.
- Promote a feeling of well-being.

Your child should do their exercise program little by little over time. This helps to increase your child's strength and endurance. This handout includes guidelines that are very important to help your child with a safe and successful recovery.

## Exercise: Warming up and cooling down

### Warm up

- **With moderate exercise, the NORMAL heart knows to warm up and cool down with the help of hormones that circulate in our body. It is also helped by branches of a nerve connected to the heart.**
- TRANSPLANTED hearts are denervated – meaning that the nerves normally connected to the heart are not reconnected during surgery. This means that the new heart is now warming up with help from the hormones only and responds slower to exercise.

Warm up gives your child's new heart more time to catch up to their body during exercise.

Your child should stop exercise and start to cool down if they have any of these:

- Dizziness
- More fatigue than normal (extreme tiredness and weakness)
- Shortness of breath (trouble taking a breath or breathing harder than is normal for your child during exercise)
- Chest pain
- Nausea

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Home exercise guidelines after a heart transplant, continued

---

## Cool down

Cool down is important to the denervated heart because it lets your child's heart rate slowly decrease. If your child stops exercise all of a sudden while their heart rate is up, then your child may feel dizzy, nauseated or faint. (Keep in mind that heart rate is the number of times your child's heart beats in 1 minute).

Your child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical or occupational therapist: \_\_\_\_\_

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**