

## What happens when you go into the cardiac rehabilitation programme?

### *A patient who has been through the process is pleased to share his experience...*

After having a couple of coronary stents, I didn't feel that I was recovering particularly well. When I came in for my post-op check-up a few weeks later, Fiona was not terribly impressed with my progress either and felt I should enter the cardiac rehabilitation programme as soon as possible.

Within a few days I was asked to come to Ward 4A at Wycombe Hospital for an assessment. This took about an hour. It began with one of the nurses checking my blood pressure and weight. I was horrified to discover that I was officially overweight. Next stop was Lesley, the physiologist, who gave me a walking test during which I wore a special pulse monitor. It involved walking up and down the exercise room gradually increasing my speed to see how well I could do. For someone who had been extremely active, I was pretty slow. Lesley also asked me to gauge how well I thought my recovery was going on a scale of one to 10. I told her I was at minus one and I wasn't kidding.

Walking is a key part of the rehabilitation process and she lent me a super little step counter to measure how many steps I was taking each day. She also invited me to come along to lectures at the hospital and booked me into weekly gym sessions. To monitor my progress, she gave me an Activity Record in which we set some targets and in which I could log the number of steps and physical activities I undertook each day. Before I left, Lesley gave me a bumper fun pack including a *Care4Today* folder containing information on everything to do with cardiac recovery - from diet and exercise to managing stress and medicines. Supporting all this there's a great website which you can use to track your progress to see how your weight, blood pressure and activity levels have improved.

The following week I attended the lectures at the hospital which were very useful and informal. As well as the nursing team, the dietitian and pharmacist came and spoke to us. I also had my first session at the gym. There were half a dozen patients and, of course, we were all in much the same boat which was quite comforting. The session was run by Aaron, a highly qualified fitness instructor, supported by Shona, one of the nurses from the rehab team. Before we started, Shona checked that we were alright and if there had been any changes to our medication. She also wanted to know how many steps

we'd taken. Then it was up to the gym. First, we warmed up on an exercise bike or treadmill very gently for about 15 minutes and then did 25 minutes at a slightly brisker pace before cooling down for ten minutes. Every few minutes Aaron and Shona checked our pulse rates and that we were ok. Finally, we lifted some very light weights and finished off with some stretches. The whole thing took around an hour and a half.

After any cardiac event, you can't help but be a bit anxious about exercising so it was really good to do it under expert supervision. One week I didn't feel too well so Shona very wisely sent me home. At first, it didn't seem as if I was making very much progress but, as my Activity Record confirmed, after three or four weeks I was able to do more generally and I was gradually getting stronger. I was also able to do many more steps a day. As well as the gym sessions, I went along to Lesley's excellent relaxation classes at the hospital.

I went to eight gym sessions in all by which time I was able to do more than 10,000 steps a day – which is about four and a half miles. Then it was time to go back to Ward 4A for a final assessment to see how much I had actually improved. To my relief, I had lost the best part of a stone and was back to my fighting weight. I did the walking test again and I was about 60% faster. When Lesley asked me where I thought my recovery was, I was able to say that from minus one, I was now pushing seven. That's what I call a result. I'm pleased to say I am continuing to improve. Before I left, Lesley had a surprise for me. I won't tell you what it was so as not to ruin the surprise for you. All I'll say is that it made me feel very pleased with myself. Alas, I had to give my step counter back. It's a great gadget, so I bought one for myself and never leave home without it.

One thing I didn't realise is that the NHS does not entirely fund the cardiac rehabilitation service in Buckinghamshire. The all-important exercise component – the gym sessions, the step counters, the trainers, even the uniforms the staff wear - are all funded by charitable donation. Running it costs more than £20,000 a year and if you want to say thanks to the rehab team, there is no better way than by supporting *Hearts & Souls*, a charity dedicated to raising this money. You'll find information in Ward 4A. Or simply visit [www.heartsandsouls.org.uk](http://www.heartsandsouls.org.uk). And do please remember to hand your step counter back!

As you've probably guessed, I strongly recommend the rehab programme and hope you benefit from it as much as I have. I wish you the speediest possible recovery.

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