

WAITING FOR HEART SURGERY

SELF-MANAGEMENT TOOL

Prehab team: 613-696-7000, ext. 19988

Nursing coordinator (24/7): 613-696-7000, ext. 0

Your surgeon: _____

Surgical Triage Office: 613-696-7062

GREEN ZONE (ALL CLEAR)	
• No new/worsening symptoms (see yellow zone) • No new medication side effects • Stable weight • Blood pressure within target range set by your care team	If you are in the Green Zone: • Your symptoms are under control. What you should do: • Keep taking your medications as directed. • Continue following good nutrition and activity plans found in your Waiting for Cardiac Surgery patient guide. • Keep all appointments with your doctor or healthcare team.
YELLOW ZONE (CAUTION!)	
New/worsening: • Angina or heart-related pain (chest, jaw, neck or arm pain), including frequency/intensity • Shortness of breath • Dizziness, lightheadedness or heart palpitations • Waking up at night with shortness of breath or needing extra pillows to sleep • Swelling (in feet, legs, hands or belly) • Fatigue, weakness • Increase in nitroglycerin use (if prescribed) • Difficulty doing daily activities • Weight gain of more than 2 lb./day or 5 lb./week • Blood pressure not within target range • If you have diabetes: fasting blood sugar over 7 mmol/L before meals	If you are in the Yellow Zone: • Your medications may need to be adjusted. What you should do: • For heart symptoms: • Notify the Surgical Triage Office. • Notify your surgeon's office about any change or increase in symptoms. • After hours/weekends/statutory holidays: call the nursing coordinator. • For other concerns, consider making an appointment with your family doctor, diabetes team or cardiologist as needed.
RED ZONE (ALERT!)	
• Shortness of breath at rest • Wheezing or chest tightness at rest • Needing to sit in a chair to sleep • Sweating, nausea, racing or irregular heartbeat, feeling weak, or like you might faint • Feeling very unwell Sudden signs of a stroke (even if temporary): • Weakness/numbness in the face, arm, or leg • Confusion or difficulty speaking/understanding • Trouble with your vision • Severe and unusual headache • Loss of balance, especially with any of the above signs	See a doctor right away. Go to your nearest Emergency Department or call 911.

If you have been prescribed nitroglycerin and experience angina/chest pain:

- At the first sign of angina or heart symptoms → Stop immediately and rest
- If no relief with five minutes of rest → Take a nitroglycerin spray or tablet
- If no relief within five minutes → Take a second nitroglycerin spray or tablet
- If no relief within five minutes → **Call 911** and take a third nitroglycerin spray or tablet

To help prepare you for your upcoming heart surgery, you and your caregiver(s) should:

Read the “Waiting for Cardiac Surgery” patient guide and watch the videos: ottawaheart.ca/waiting-cardiac-surgery

Attend the “Waiting for Cardiac Surgery” webinar: ottawaheart.ca/calendar

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS	GOAL	RESOURCES
Tobacco and cannabis use	- Quit smoking (including cannabis) at least 4 weeks before and 4 weeks after surgery to lower your risk of infection, breathing problems and blood clots, and to help you go home sooner. Even cutting back helps. - Reduce edible and topical cannabis use as early as possible, and at least 72 hours before surgery.	- For questions/help related to tobacco, vaping or cannabis use: 613-696-7069 or quitsmoking@ottawaheart.ca - Safety guidelines: ottawaheart.ca/cannabis-heart-health
Finances and support after surgery	- Make sure you can afford all your medications. - Apply for benefits or financial help if needed (medication, dental, employment insurance, sick leave, etc.). - Arrange support for the first 2 weeks after leaving the hospital. You’ll need help with daily tasks.	For a social work referral, call the Prehab team.
Alcohol	Avoid alcohol for at least 4 weeks before and 4 weeks after surgery.	Safety guidelines (especially if you drink regularly): ottawaheart.ca/word-about-alcohol
Diabetes and prediabetes	If you have diabetes, aim for: - HbA1C equal to or below 7.0% - Fasting glucose values between 4 and 7 mmol/L - Ensure your glucometer is working and that you have enough supplies.	If your HbA1C is above 6.5%, or if your fasting glucose is often above 7 (e.g., two readings above 10 before meals or 2 hours after meals), follow up with your healthcare team, endocrinologist or diabetes specialist in the community.
Nutrition	- Keep your weight steady. Don’t try to lose weight now. - Eat at regular times and include protein (e.g., Greek yogurt, fish, nuts) at every meal and snack. - Consider adding a nutritional drink (e.g., Boost, Ensure, Glucerna) 1-2 times a day. A higher-protein diet 4 weeks before and after surgery supports healing and reduces the risk of infection.	- For a dietitian referral, call the Prehab team. - Tips for healthy eating: ottawaheart.ca/rehab-top-10-tips
Mobility and activity	- If you will have a sternotomy (an incision down the centre of your chest), practice getting in and out of bed without using your hands. - Start or continue being active (walking is great) and doing the exercises in your patient guide. - Avoid activities that cause heart symptoms. Listen to your body.	Call 613-696-7070 for more information about cardiac rehabilitation programs.
Dental care	For patients awaiting valve surgery: - Make sure to have a dental exam and cleaning within 6 months of your surgery date (unless you have full upper and lower dentures). - Good dental care and hygiene can help decrease your risk of infection.	- Book an appointment with your dentist. - If you cannot get an appointment, tell your healthcare team or call the Prehab team.
Mental health	Waiting for surgery can be stressful. If the stress is affecting your sleep, relationships, or daily life, consider seeking support to help you cope.	- Contact your healthcare team if the stress, anxiety, or depression worsens. - Contact the Prehab team about available psychology services, including workshops on mental preparation and coping. - Tips for emotional health: ottawaheart.ca/rehab-top-10-tips