Outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation

Why should I attend an outpatient cardiac rehabilitation program?
Cardiac Rehabilitation programs are designed to help patients with heart disease recover faster. Recent studies have shown that patients who participate in cardiac rehabilitation programs:
- Feel better faster
- Have more stamina
- Get stronger
- Feel less stress and or depression
- Are less likely to have future heart problems
- Live longer

Who benefits from outpatient cardiac rehabilitation programs?
Almost all persons with heart disease benefit from cardiac rehabilitation. For example:
- Patients with heart disease such as angina, congestive heart failure, or those who have had a heart attack
- Patients who have had coronary bypass surgery or a balloon catheter (PTCA) procedure
- Patients who have had a heart transplant
Men and women, young and old benefit from cardiac rehabilitation.

What is included in outpatient cardiac rehabilitation?
Outpatient cardiac rehabilitation has two major parts:
- Exercise training. Cardiac rehabilitation is designed to help you improve your flexibility, endurance, muscle strength, functional independence, and quality of life. Each patient’s program is individually tailored to his/her own abilities, needs and interests.
- Education and Counseling. A very important part of cardiac rehabilitation programs is education about heart disease and training in ways that you can make lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of future problems. The cardiac rehab team identifies each patient’s own risk factors for coronary artery disease. The specific risk factors are then targeted in education and counseling programming. The education might take place in small groups or individual sessions with a rehabilitation team member. Modifiable risk factors for coronary artery disease include smoking, high blood cholesterol, physical inactivity, diabetes, obesity, and stress/depression.
Who makes up the Cardiac Rehabilitation Team?
A variety of health care professionals may participate on the cardiac rehabilitation team, including:
- Doctors (Family doctors, cardiologists, cardiac surgeons, rehabilitation doctors, and psychiatrists)
- Nurses
- Physical and Occupational Therapists
- Exercise Physiologists
- Dieticians
- Psychologists
- Health Educators
- Pharmacists
- The Patient! You need to actively participate in the program communicating your needs, asking questions, and following through with lifestyle changes.

How do I choose a program that's right for me?
Call ahead in order to be sure the program is right for you. It should include education about heart disease and counseling for lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of future problems. If you smoke it should include a smoking cessation program. The inpatient cardiac rehabilitation team can help you find a center convenient to where you live. Ask your doctor for any suggestions he or she may have.

Is it safe?
Cardiac rehabilitation programs are safe. Medical problems during cardiac rehabilitation are rare. Current research has shown that exercise training at lower intensities for a longer duration may provide the same benefits as that at higher intensities. The rehabilitation team will design a program that is safe for you.

How do I get started?
Before leaving the hospital or on your first check up with your cardiologist ask him/her for a prescription for outpatient cardiac rehabilitation. Call the facility to make an appointment. Current national recommendations suggest that you begin outpatient cardiac rehabilitation one to three weeks after discharge from the hospital.

You can contact the outpatient cardiac rehabilitation centers at New York Presbyterian Hospital at the numbers below:
- The Outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation Program at Columbia University Medical Center – (212) 305-4695
- Weill Cornell Cardiac Health Center – (212) 746-1200
Other cardiac rehabilitation information sources:

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
http://www.ahrq.gov
Clinical Practice Guidelines: Patient Guide to Cardiac Rehabilitation

American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation
http://www.aacvpr.org
Membership Directory of Cardiac Rehabilitation Facilities

American Heart Association
http://www.americanheart.org
Patient Education Materials

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
Patient Education Materials

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied on for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. For answers to your health related questions talk to your health care providers for guidance before making a health care decision.

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