



# What Happens After Heart Surgery?

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## What are the ICU and CCU?

In a hospital, ICU stands for Intensive Care Unit and CCU stands for Coronary Care Unit. These are places with special equipment and highly trained nurses and doctors. This is where patients go after open-heart surgery or a heart attack. You're watched around the clock, and the care you get here will help you recover safely and quickly. You may stay for several days, depending on the type of heart surgery and the time you need to recover. Then you may go to a regular hospital room.



In the ICU, patients are watched very closely by highly trained healthcare professionals.

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## Can my family visit?

- A few hours after surgery, close family members can see you in the ICU for short visits.
- They should expect you to look pale and puffy. This is normal after surgery.
- They should expect to see lots of tubes and wires hooked up to you and the machines that monitor you.
- The staff will tell your family how you are doing.
- Family visits and support may help you recover.
- Family members can help by touching and talking to you. Family can also help you communicate with the staff.

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## What happens in the ICU?

- You'll wake up and feel confused at first.
- It's noisy and busy. The pace is fast and the lights are always on.
- It's normal to lose track of time while you're there.
- You'll be hooked up to many tubes and wires.
- Your wrists may be strapped down lightly so you don't pull out any tubes or wires by mistake.

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## What are the tubes and wires for?

- You'll be hooked up to machines so nurses can check your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and other vital signs.
- You may have a tube in your mouth and throat to help you breathe. It's uncomfortable and you can't talk with it, but nurses will help you communicate.
- The breathing tube will stay in until you can breathe on your own — a few hours.
- Tubes are used to give medicine, drain fluids and take blood samples.
- There may be small wires hooked up to your lower chest to pace your heart.

## What should my family know?

- When someone has surgery, it’s normal for their family members to feel upset, angry and afraid.
- Their nerves may be on edge and they may be tired. They should talk about these feelings and not keep them in.
- They should take care of themselves, too, with regular meals and rest.

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It’s very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

When will I leave the ICU? \_\_\_\_\_

How long will the breathing tube stay in? \_\_\_\_\_

