



Family Education Sheet

Home Care for Adults and Teens After Vascular Ring or Airway Related Surgery

When to call your health care provider

Call your cardiologist or primary care provider if you have:

- Signs of an infection: fever of 101.5°F/38.6°C or higher, pain, redness, swelling or drainage at the incision site
- Extreme tiredness
- Fast breathing or a hard time breathing (shortness of breath)
- Poor eating or drinking
- Problems taking medications
- Skin color changes (pale, blue or gray skin)
- Vomiting (throwing up)

When to call 911

- If you are having a medical emergency
- If you experience:
 - Chest pain that does not go away
 - Dizziness or a feeling like you are going to faint (pass out)
 - Heart palpitations (fast heartbeats)

For questions or more information

- **If you have questions about your health after going home,** contact your cardiologist or primary care provider.
- **If you have not yet met with your doctor since your surgery:**
 - During regular business hours, contact Boston Children's Hospital Vascular Ring and Airway Team through email or the MyChart Portal.
 - Outside of regular business hours, contact the CV surgery fellow at 617-355-3212.

After your surgery, you will have these follow-up appointments. **It's very important to keep all of these appointments.**

	Cardiac surgery post-op visit (virtual visit)
	Follow-up with cardiologist (1 to 2 weeks)
	Follow-up with primary care provider (1 to 2 weeks)
	Follow-up Vascular Ring Team (1 month, 6 months virtual visit)
	Follow-up Vascular Ring Team (1 year, virtual or in-person visit)

Care at home

Things to watch out for

Dysphagia

What it is: Dysphagia is difficulty swallowing.

Likelihood of happening: Many people with a vascular ring or compression have dysphagia before surgery. These symptoms sometimes last after surgery.

What to do: Please **call us** if you see an increase in these symptoms:

- Coughing while eating
- Increased retching or gagging not related to illness
- Feeling like food is getting stuck in the throat
- If swallowing is painful or stressful

Respiratory issues

What it is: difficulty breathing, chronic (ongoing) cough or frequent respiratory infections

Likelihood of happening: Some people have breathing issues before surgery. These issues may last a few weeks after airway surgery.

What to do: Please **call us** if you see an increase in these symptoms:

- Recurrent and/or prolonged respiratory infections
- Pneumonia, wheezing and persistent cough
- Shortness of breath with activity or exercise

Pain

Pain after surgery can be expected. You may have pain from muscle aches in the neck, shoulders and back.

- **Take all pain medications as directed by your provider.**
- If you still have pain after taking the pain medications as directed, call your primary provider.

Incision care

- **Watch incisions for an infection.** Call your health care provider right away if you see any signs of an infection (fever, redness, pain, swelling or drainage from the wound).
- Most sutures (stitches) are dissolvable.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing so clothes do not rub against the incision.
- If you have non-dissolvable sutures (black, green or blue colored), they will be removed during a follow-up visit with us or with your primary care provider.
- You may see a piece of white stitch or a white knot sticking out of the incision. This is part of the dissolvable suture and you should leave it alone. If you questions or concerns, call your health care provider.
- A special glue called Dermabond may be on the outer layer of the incision. Leave it in place. It will wear off over time.

Scar care

- Scars often look worse before they start to look better. They should start looking less red about 3 months after surgery. Most scars completely heal after about a year.
- Keep scars out of direct sunlight for at least the first 6 months. It is OK and encouraged to use sunscreen over your wound if exposed to sunlight during the first year after the surgery.
- In about 3 weeks after surgery, you may be able to use lotions like Mederma, Aquaphor, vitamin E or aloe. **You can use lotion only if the scabs have fallen off, the wound is healing well and there is no infection.** Massage the scar for 5 minutes, twice a day.

Activities

General guidelines

- Don't lift more than 10 pounds for 6 weeks.
- You may be sexually active when you feel well enough.
- If you smoke, it's very important that you stop. Talk to your primary care provider if you need help.

Diet

Follow the instructions given to you by your care team.




Going on vacation

Everyone heals differently and is ready for trips at different times. Don't go on a vacation until after your first follow-up appointments. Talk to the cardiologist or primary care doctor before you make plans to travel

Swimming and bathing

Type of Surgery

Time After Operation

			
	Shower	Soaking in a tub	Swimming
Sternotomy	Immediately (keep the incision turned away from the water)	3 weeks	6 weeks
Thoracotomy	Immediately (keep the incision turned away from the water)	3 weeks	4 weeks

- You can shower with Dermabond as long as you have your back turned away from the water.
- Don't soak your chest in water or swim until the Dermabond has fallen off, wounds are healed without signs of an infection and scabs have fallen off.

Driving

- If you have a sternotomy incision, don't drive for 6 weeks after surgery. If you have a thoracotomy, you can drive when you feel well enough. **Before driving, you must be feeling well and be:**
 - Off all narcotic pain medications
 - Able to turn your head to the side without any pain
- Always wear your seatbelt correctly. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines.

Exercise and sports

- After a sternotomy, the sternum takes about 6 weeks to heal. It is very important to protect the chest during this time. For the first few weeks, it is OK to do light activity like walking.
- After a Thoracotomy you may start moderate activity after 3-4 weeks.
- Make a plan with the cardiologist and/or surgeon before returning to other activities, including recreational or competitive sports. Please call your health care provider if you need a note for gym class if you are in school.
- You may need to wait longer to return to full contact sports and weight lifting.

Returning to school or work

Returning to school or work varies by patient and by situation. Talk with your cardiologist for more information. Below are general recommendations.

- Many patients are able to go back to school in about 2 weeks after being discharged home or after their first cardiology or primary care doctor follow-up appointment.
- Many adults return to work in 6 weeks after a sternotomy and 3-4 weeks after a thoracotomy.
- If you need a note for school or work, call your health care provider.

Staying healthy

Infections and crowds

- It's important to stay healthy and not get an infection for the first couple of weeks after surgery.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water.**
- Consider limiting contact with visitors and staying away from crowded public places. If people in your house are ill, you may want to try to limit your contact with them.

Immunizations

- We recommend flu shots for most patients. Please talk about this with your health care provider.
- Wait at least 4 weeks after surgery to get immunizations.

How we will communicate with your health care provider

We will send your discharge information, including details of surgery and blood test results, to your primary care provider and home cardiologist.