

Sexual relationships

After a heart attack questions regarding sexual activity often go unasked and unanswered because of embarrassment. It has been shown that whilst people return to all aspects of normal living after a heart attack, a number of them do not return to their normal sexual activities. Sexual activities may be resumed soon after you have been discharged from hospital, provided that you feel reasonably fit and ready to do so. Obviously you will have fears:-

- will it bring on another heart attack?
- will it cause chest pain?

The risk of another heart attack during sexual intercourse is fairly small. Studies have shown that the workload on the heart during sex is about the same as climbing two flights of stairs. If you do develop chest pains during intercourse, stop and use your GTN. If necessary you can use GTN immediately before intercourse to prevent chest discomfort developing. However, if you take medication for erectile dysfunction you should avoid using these together. If necessary, you can use GTN immediately before intercourse to prevent chest discomfort developing.

A word of caution is necessary. Studies have shown that extra marital relationships place more strain on the heart. However, in a stable relationship in which the couple are comfortable and familiar with one another, the risk is minimal. During the first few weeks it often happens that the desire for intercourse does not return. The worries that you have may reduce you and your partners desire to make love. This should pass in time as your confidence builds up. If you find you are having problems resuming your sex life it is important to discuss this with your doctor or nurse. Ignoring the problem can make it worse and lead to stress in your relationship.

Emotions after a heart attack

A heart attack is not just a physical event. It involves changes in emotions as well. It is normal to experience any of the following –

- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Loss of interest
- Tiredness
- Poor concentration
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling angry
- Anxiety

Your family may experience similar feelings. They may be worried about you and want to protect you from too much stress and activity. Some families become over protective and sometimes this can lead to frustration. Your family and friends can be more supportive to you if you tell them how you are feeling. Be honest about the way you feel and work together towards your recovery. You should remember that you are not an invalid and that you can return to a normal life.