

## Intimacy and Heart Disease: Resuming Sexual Intimacy

When you both feel ready for sex, start slowly. Once you have your doctor's approval, having sex with a partner you know well, in nearly all cases, will not cause a heart attack (also known as acute myocardial infarction or AMI). On average, sex takes about as much energy as climbing 2 flights of stairs. Here are tips for resuming safe sexual intimacy.

Be patient. Give your partner and yourself time to rebuild intimacy.

### Helpful hints

- Start out slowly and give yourself time to feel ready. Try hugging, kissing, touching, or caressing at first. They help you both feel close and wanted.
- Foreplay, which includes activities that arouse but are short of intercourse, also helps the body relax for the activities to come next.
- Choose a quiet, relaxed place to be intimate. Keep the temperature in the room comfortable.
- Choose a time when you both feel rested. Try when you wake up in the morning or after taking a nap.
- Wait at least 1 hour after eating, taking a bath or shower, or exercising before you have sex.
- If your doctor has prescribed medicine to be taken before sex, take it as directed.



### If you have problems

- If you have chest pain (angina) during sex, stop and take nitroglycerin as prescribed by your doctor. Contact your doctor as directed. Keep in mind that it is unsafe to take nitroglycerin in combination with certain drugs for erectile dysfunction. If you have chest pain after having taken a medicine that makes nitroglycerin unsafe, do not take nitroglycerin. Instead, wait and relax for a few minutes. If your chest pain does not get better and go away, call your doctor.
- If you have shortness of breath during sex, stop for a few minutes. If it doesn't go away, or if it comes back when you resume sex, call your doctor.
- If you have trouble sleeping after sex, or you are very tired the next day, talk to your doctor.
- If you can't become aroused, talk with your doctor. Erectile dysfunction is fairly common. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medicine to improve sexual function unless you are taking nitrates.

### If you've had heart surgery

If you've had heart surgery, ask your doctor when you can resume sex. Once your doctor approves, sex should not cause any harm. Healing from surgery most often takes 4 to 6 weeks. To prevent pain until you've healed, stick with lower level activities that avoid putting stress on your chest area.

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