

Activity guidelines for the sternum following open heart surgery

Goal

To minimise stress and excessive motion of the healing breastbone (sternum)

Remember

- The sternum may take 8-12 weeks or longer to unite
- Listen to your body as it will set the safe limits for activity
- Contact a medical practitioner or physiotherapist if you have any queries

1. Avoid the following activities:

- Reaching above the head with one arm (e.g. hanging washing, painting walls)
- Pushing large objects (e.g. shopping trolley, lawn mower)
- Carrying weights >5kgs (e.g. child, shopping bags)
- Heavy manual tasks (e.g. making a bed, sweeping)
- Sporting activities that use one side of the body at a time (e.g. swimming (all strokes))
- Exercises with arm weights
- Twisting your trunk

2. Use two arms

When doing activities try to use both arms where possible, e.g. pushing up from a chair. Avoid doing heavy activities with one arm, as this puts an unnecessary strain on your sternum.

3. Keep an upright posture

Sit upright with the back supported and avoid sitting leaning on one forearm or rotating the trunk.

4. Driving

Check with your cardiologist or cardiothoracic surgeon about driving. If you can drive, avoid driving for more than 1 hour at a time.