

## SECTION C: HOW TO OVERCOME YOUR CARDIAC REHAB BARRIERS

Here are your top cardiac rehabilitation barriers and ideas on how to overcome each:

### 1. Distance

Check with your physician(s) or cardiac rehab program to ask if there is a program close to your home or work (if applicable). If there is not, you can also ask about home-based cardiac rehab options; It may be possible for you to get care through phone or video calls with your cardiac rehab team, after going for a few sessions to get oriented.

If there is no program close by or the program cannot support you to do your rehab from home, we suggest you: (1) have an appointment with a physiotherapist if possible to develop an exercise plan, and then you could follow along here from home <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/cardiac-rehabilitation-at-home/cardiac-rehabilitation-exercise-videos>, (2) work with your primary care provider to make sure all of your heart risk factors are controlled (i.e., cholesterol, blood pressure, tobacco cessation supports, healthy diet, psychosocial management), and (3) complete the comprehensive heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiacollege/Pages/default.aspx>. There is a 12-week challenge there as well you may want to try (see Thrive on right)

### 2. Cost

Some cardiac rehab programs cost money to attend, and others do not. Ask your cardiac rehab team about the cost to attend the program. If there is no free option available and you have financial pressures, the cardiac rehab team may be able to reduce the cost. You could also ask your primary care provider about any available programs with no cost. Alternatively if you truly cannot afford cardiac rehab and there are no low-cost options available, we suggest you: (1) have an appointment with a physiotherapist if possible to develop an exercise plan, and then you could follow along here from home <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/cardiac-rehabilitation-at-home/cardiac-rehabilitation-exercise-videos>, (2) work with your primary care provider to make sure all of your heart risk factors are controlled (i.e., cholesterol, blood pressure, tobacco cessation supports, healthy diet, psychosocial management), and (3) complete the comprehensive heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiacollege/Pages/default.aspx>. There is a 12-week challenge there as well you may want to try (see Thrive on right).

If your concerns are related to costs for transportation, again, as your cardiac rehab team of there are lower cost parking passes available, public transit and/or support to cover transportation costs.

### 3. Challenges Getting to in-Person Sessions

Check Google maps or another such program for different ways to get to your cardiac rehab program (e.g., car, public transit). Ask the cardiac rehab team if there are transportation supports available or if you can arrange to carpool. Or ask if an extended family member could get you to some sessions.

If there is no support available to help you get to sessions, you can also ask about home-based cardiac rehab options; It may be possible for you to get your cardiac rehab through phone or video calls with your cardiac rehab team, after going for a few sessions to get oriented. If this is an option, check about the cost.

If you don't have a contact at the cardiac rehab program, ask your primary care provider to find out for you if there is a closer program for you to attend.

If there is no support for you to get to cardiac rehab and no home-based option, we suggest you: (1) have an appointment with a physiotherapist if possible to develop an exercise plan, and then you could follow along here from home <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/cardiac-rehabilitation-at-home/cardiac-rehabilitation-exercise-videos>, (2) work with your primary care provider to make sure all of your heart risk factors are controlled (i.e., cholesterol, blood pressure, tobacco cessation supports, healthy diet, psychosocial management), and (3) complete the comprehensive heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiacollege/Pages/default.aspx>. There is a 12-week challenge there as well you may want to try (see Thrive on right).

#### 4. Bad weather conditions

We definitely want you to arrive at cardiac rehab safely. If road conditions are poor due to weather, you may want to call your cardiac rehab program contact to ask about doing your session remotely (e.g., phone or videocall). Work with your cardiac rehab program to identify a place to get your exercise inside, away from the elements.

#### 5. Not knowing about cardiac rehabilitation

It is unfortunate you were not encouraged to attend cardiac rehab by your healthcare providers. They are often very busy, so may have overlooked it. We are so glad that you have learned about cardiac rehab and are taking this self-assessment.

You can find out more about what cardiac rehab offers here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjiOaz-0H2E>. Participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life, less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer.

Please ask your primary care provider about getting a referral, and/or your cardiac specialist. Then the program will contact you about getting started and answer any questions you might have. You could share with them this barrier self-assessment! If you are still having trouble getting a referral, you can contact us at the gmail address below.

6. I do not need cardiac rehab

You may feel ok, and feel “cured” from bypass surgery or getting a stent. It is important for you to know that the blood vessels throughout your body are still diseased. Patients who have heart disease are at higher risk of having another heart problem than people without heart disease, but you can lower your risk through participating in cardiac rehab. It results in many benefits, such as better quality of life, less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer.

Also know that your cardiac rehab program will be tailored to you. The rehab staff will focus on your goals, and create a plan just for you to get back to your best health. Cardiac rehab is a very comprehensive program that considers not only medical risk factors such as cholesterol and blood pressure, but also supports you to live a heart-healthy lifestyle (e.g., exercise, diet, tobacco cessation), provides education, and support for returning to your life roles and for optimizing your psychosocial well-being.

Cardiac rehab is recommended for all heart patients in medical guidelines because of all these benefits. If you have not been referred, ask your primary care provider at your next opportunity.

7. Doctor or other HCP did not feel it was necessary

It is unfortunate you perceived one of your healthcare providers was not supportive of your participation in cardiac rehab. This is likely an error, because based on a lot of excellent research showing its benefits, doctors are directed to refer all their heart patients to cardiac rehab. Perhaps your doctor was not very familiar with what cardiac rehab entails. It is a comprehensive program to provide you education regarding your heart and how to manage your condition (including the importance of the pills your doctor prescribes), supports you in making heart-healthy behaviour changes, as well as in returning to your life roles.

You can get referred to CR by any physician. So you could ask your cardiologist if you have one or primary care physician to refer you. Some programs accept referrals from patients or other providers. It is so important to your health, so be sure to get referred soon.

8. I don't think it will help me

Actually, very rigorous research shows that participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life (and you can feel stronger and able to get back to the activities you want to engage in), less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer. For this reason, it is recommended that all heart patients go to cardiac rehab. If you participate in cardiac rehab, you will likely live many more years than the patient that does not go.

## 9. Already exercising at home/community

That is excellent that you are active. That is a big part of reducing your risk of having further heart problems. However, cardiac rehab isn't just about exercise, so you need to go to reap all the benefits. The cardiac rehab staff will certainly want to hear about your successes in incorporating exercise into your life, and encourage you to continue that. They will also check about your cholesterol and blood pressure control, provide any needed information to support you in eating a heart-healthy diet, assess your psychosocial well-being and help you where needed, and assist you in returning to all your life roles after your heart event.

Given how comprehensive cardiac rehab is, participation results in many benefits, such as better quality of life (you can get back to doing all the things you love and feel great while doing it), less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer. If you have not yet been referred, ask your primary care provider at your next opportunity.

## 10. Work responsibilities

Many heart patients do not have sick benefits nor the option of modified work or work hours through their recovery. If you do not have some vacation you could use, it would be worthwhile to talk to your cardiac rehab program contact to determine if there is session availability before or after your work hours.

If there is not, you can also ask about home-based cardiac rehab options; It may be possible for you to get your cardiac rehab through phone or video calls with your cardiac rehab team, after going for a few sessions to get oriented.

If the program cannot offer rehab in a way that works with your work schedule, we suggest you: (1) follow this heart exercise program online <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/cardiac-rehabilitation-at-home/cardiac-rehabilitation-exercise-videos>, (2) work with your primary care provider to make sure all of your heart risk factors are controlled (i.e., cholesterol, blood pressure, tobacco cessation supports, healthy diet, psychosocial management), and (3) complete the comprehensive heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiacollege/Pages/default.aspx>. There is a 12-week challenge there as well you may want to try (see Thrive on right).

## 11. Family Responsibilities

We know family comes first and you have obligations to help your loved ones, but remember if you want to continue your family responsibilities for as long as possible, it is important for you to put your heart health first right now. If you make time for cardiac rehabilitation, you will be less likely to need to go to the hospital again, and you will also become stronger and more able to do things needed to help your family. People who go

to cardiac rehab live longer. If you discuss this with your family, I am sure they will agree you need to find ways to make it to your cardiac rehab sessions.

Here are some ideas:

- Ask extended family members to take over some of your family responsibilities for a short period
- Some cardiac rehab programs welcome family members into the program. If your family member is an adult that can do some basic walking, they may be able to join in, and reap the benefits too. Ask your program.
- See if you can hire someone (e.g., teen neighbour, personal support worker, cleaning help) to take over some of your family responsibilities in the short term.
- Check with your primary care provider for available community services for caregiving in the home/ respite
- Ask your cardiac rehab program about home-based options. It may be possible for you to get your cardiac rehab through phone or video calls with your cardiac rehab team, after going for a few sessions to get oriented.

## 12. Other time constraints

We know how busy modern life is. It is very important however you make time for cardiac rehab, as you will end up having more energy to do the things you need to do, and you will live longer.

Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Talk to your cardiac rehab team about session time availability to find something that works for you.
- Some programs have home-based supports, so you exercise when you can at home or in your community, but have regular contacts with the cardiac rehab staff to address all your heart risk factors and educate you about your heart health via phone or videocall at your convenience.
- Talk to your cardiac rehab program contact about what parts of the program are most important for you, and how you can fit it in.
- Most programs offer stress management, which includes a time management component. This can help you get a better hold of you
- Remember you don't need to do all your exercise at once; you can do 10 minutes here and there each day.
- See if family members or others can take some of your load while you are doing your cardiac rehab program. Your loved ones want to see you well, and have you around for many more years to come.

## 13. Travel

No one can plan when heart disease will strike! After your heart event, we know you want to get back to your life activities. Remember however that cardiac rehab is a standard of care for heart patients just like a stent and heart medications, because of all

the research showing its' positive impact. Participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life, less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer.

So, to be able to travel for many years to come, it is important to actively participate in your cardiac rehab program now. It may be possible to get started with your program in person, and then move to more remote delivery, where your cardiac rehab team supports you through your program via phone or videocalls for example. Ask at your program what could be done so you can complete your full program.

If you absolutely cannot get to sessions, you could follow this online cardiac rehab exercise routine <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/cardiac-rehabilitation-at-home/cardiac-rehabilitation-exercise-videos>, and complete the comprehensive heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiaccollege/Pages/default.aspx>. Make sure you work with your doctor to ensure all your heart risk factors are controlled through medication.

#### 14. Not having energy / feeling down, hopeless

Many heart patients do not feel well, and they are also often down due to trying to cope with their heart disease. You are not alone. Your cardiac rehab team will understand this and support you.

Given the benefits of participation, and that cardiac rehab programs are individually-tailored to meet your needs, we recommend you try it out and start. Be open with your cardiac rehab program contact about your lack of energy and how it could be a barrier to you fully engaging in the program. You can work together to focus on only your key goals, and start slow. Make a plan to re-visit how you are feeling after a couple of weeks, to see if you can continue on or something needs to change.

Participating in cardiac rehab will result in you having more energy. They can also assess your psychosocial well-being and help you if there are non-heart-related reasons for your low energy.

#### 15. Exercise is tiring or painful

Many patients find exercise tiring at the beginning, and may have memories of being tired from exercise in the past. However, at cardiac rehab, the team will develop an exercise program just for you, so you will not be as tired. If you do find yourself too tired, let the staff know, and they will work with you to optimize your exercise routine. Research shows that you will actually have more energy after exercising. Most of our cardiac rehab patients tell us they can't believe how much better they feel once they get going with their exercise program.

Other patients find exercise painful due to musculoskeletal issues or other health conditions such as arthritis. Your cardiac rehab team will talk to you about non-weight bearing exercise options (e.g., recumbent bikes, pool) and how to relieve pain. They will develop an exercise plan specific to you that takes into consideration any joint or other pain you may have.

## 16. Other health problems

Almost every cardiac rehab participant has one or more health problems in addition to their heart disease. Cardiac rehab staff are ready to support you to improve your heart risk factor control, while taking into consideration your overall health status. Here are some examples.

- For patients with diabetes, the rehab team will teach you about eating timing in relation to exercise, help you to assess your blood sugar, and teach you about caring for your feet.
- For patients with arthritis, the rehab team can suggest non-weight-bearing exercise and work with you to achieve pain control
- For patients with osteoporosis, your rehab team will assess you for your risk of a fall, and put extra safety measures in place where needed

Remember all these other health conditions are also ameliorated with exercise, and following a healthy diet helps too. So these other health problems are actually extra reasons why you should participate in cardiac rehab.

## 17. Too old

There is no upper age limit to cardiac rehab participation. In fact, there is a lot of research showing how beneficial cardiac rehab is in older people. If you need support with transportation, or have sensory limitations, talk to the program staff regarding what accommodations can be made to enable you to fully participate.

## 18. Manage own heart problem

We are glad that you take an active stance towards managing your health. Indeed, in cardiac rehab we encourage that. We want to help alongside you.

Cardiac rehab is very comprehensive. Most heart patients are not familiar with how their heart and circulation works, what their pills do, why they need to control their blood pressure and cholesterol, etc. In cardiac rehab we also support patients to optimize their psychosocial well-being and return to life roles. So while you can likely manage some of these elements alone, there are usually some areas where our knowledgeable staff can really help patients.

While you can get quite a bit of information about managing your heart health online, you will not get information specific to your health situation, or have someone to answer your specific questions.

You might consider getting started in a program to see what it is all about. You can tell the cardiac rehab staff that you would prefer to be a bit independent in your recovery, and they will certainly accommodate and support that.

If you are a bit of an introvert like me, I can see you might not want to make the effort to go in and start a program. But research shows that participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life, less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer than those who do not.

19. I am not interested in the program or motivated / I do not like it

Oh no! This is a shame, because participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life, less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer than those who do not, so we need to rectify the situation.

Cardiac rehab programs are supposed to be individually-tailored to meet your needs. Talk to your cardiac rehab program contact and let them know your preferences. They want the program to work for you to support you in your recovery as best as they can. Perhaps you can be transitioned to have some elements asynchronously, or you prefer some components in-person and others on the phone or online. If the exercise portion is not working for you, work with the cardiac rehab program to get you set up in something at home or in your community that you prefer (e.g., local pool for aqua-aerobics or community centre for Zumba).

20. Too long to get referred into the program

It is true that there are many people like you that need cardiac rehab, so sometimes we have a back log in our programs. We regret this, and work really hard to get patients started as soon as we are able.

If you have to wait, you can start this heart patient education program available free online here: <https://www.healthuniversity.ca/en/cardiacollege/Pages/default.aspx>. You will find out how to start managing your risk factors, and exercise at a low level safely, until you can get started in your program.

It is still important for you to start your program when you do get the opportunity, no matter how much time has passed. Even if months have passed since your heart event, participating in cardiac rehab results in many benefits, such as better quality of life (you will have more energy and be able to do the things you want to do), less repeat visits to the hospital and need for heart procedures, and patients who go to cardiac rehab live longer than those who do not.

If you have to go back to work by the time they call you to start, ask the program if they have a home-based option. It may be possible for you to get your cardiac rehab through



phone or video calls with your cardiac rehab team, after going for a few sessions to get oriented.

21. Prefer to exercise alone, not in group

I am an introvert and prefer to exercise on my own. Sounds like you might be the same way. Cardiac rehab participation brings so many health benefits, so please do not let this deter you from participating. Talk to your cardiac rehab program contact, and let them know your preferences. Cardiac rehab programs are individually-tailored to meet your needs. They may be able to give you some 1-1 sessions or have other suggestions so you can still reap all the benefits of the programs. If the exercise portion is not working for you, perhaps you can be transitioned to have exercise asynchronously vs synchronously (depending on your preference), or you prefer to exercise in-person, on the phone, or online. Also, you could work with the cardiac rehab program to get you set up to exercise at home or a place in your community that offers the form of exercise you prefer (e.g., local pool for aqua-aerobics or community centre for Zumba, yoga, etc.).