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After Open-Heart Surgery: In the Hospital

The length of your hospital stay after open-heart surgery depends on what type of surgery you had and your needs. It may be as short as 5 to 7 days. In some cases, it can be several weeks or longer. Read on to learn more about what to expect during your recovery in the hospital after open-heart surgery.

Right After Surgery

After your surgery, you are moved to a recovery area called the intensive care unit (ICU). Here, hospital staff monitor you closely. When you first wake up:

- You may feel very sleepy, thirsty or cold. You may feel sick to your stomach. It's also common to be confused and disoriented for a time after heart surgery.
- Though you may be able to hear and see, you may not be able to move your body.
- You will have a breathing tube in your throat. This tube will prevent you from being able to talk.
- You will have an intravenous (IV) line in your arm or hand. This line gives you fluid and pain medication.
- You will be connected by wires to several machines. These monitor your vital signs, including your heartbeat, temperature, and blood oxygen. A machine may also help keep your heartbeat steady.
- Tubes (drains) in your chest remove air and fluid.
- A tube (catheter) drains urine from your bladder.
- You may have a tube in your stomach. This helps prevent bloating and vomiting.
- Your wrists may be gently strapped down so you don't pull out any tubes or wires by accident.



After open-heart surgery, you will wake up in the intensive care unit (ICU).

Family members may be able to visit you soon after surgery. They should know that you will have tubes and wires connected to your body. You will look pale and your face and body will look very puffy. This is all normal. You won't be able to talk to them because of the tube in your throat. A nurse can help you communicate if you need to.

The Next Few Days

- A nurse is always present in the ICU. You are monitored continuously.
- As the time passes, you may feel more awake. But you may not be able to sleep well. The ICU is a busy place. The lights are always on and it can be noisy.
- You will receive pain medication, but you may still feel some pain. Tell a nurse right away if you do feel pain.