

Heart Rehabilitation

Cardiac or heart rehabilitation is a multi-disciplinary programme which assists patients with cardiac diseases to reintegrate into the community and regain their quality of life as much as possible.

Without cardiac rehabilitation, patients are more likely to experience:

- 1) Lower quality of life
- 2) Decreased self-efficacy
- 3) Decreased exercise tolerance and capacity
- 4) Slower healing

Although it is not the first line of medical therapy, cardiac rehabilitation is important in aiding speedy patient recovery both physically and mentally - especially if one is looking at adding years to life and life to years.

What does rehabilitation involve?

Cardiac rehabilitation helps patients adopt lifelong healthy habits for the heart by empowering and educating them with relevant knowledge and practical tips to maintain a sustainable lifestyle. A multi-disciplinary team is involved in the rehabilitation, and this includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, pharmacists, cardiac doctors and nurses.

Occupational therapy:

Living with heart conditions can have a great impact on one's physical and emotional health. Issues that may require a referral to an occupational therapist include difficulties with everyday activities, stress, anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, fatigue, sleeping difficulties, or return to work advice.

In the inpatient setting, an occupational therapist may advise on approaching daily activities differently, using assistive equipment, adapting living or working environment and finding strategies to manage daily activities despite limitations. In the outpatient setting, occupational therapy can be conducted in individual or group sessions. These may include stress and anxiety management, energy conservation and pacing, goal setting, time management, lifestyle modification to prompt heart-healthy habits and participation in leisure, work and rest to support health.

Physiotherapy:

Cardiac rehabilitation encompasses three components – exercise training, education, and counselling. Each patient is prescribed an individualised exercise programme and taught how to monitor, progress their exercises safely. Patients will learn more about their own specific cardiac conditions, and will be given advice and education regarding various treatment options, modification of risk factors, and advice on exercising at home. On top of that, patients will be counselled accordingly to help alleviate any worries or concerns they may have following a recent heart episode by the therapists. They will also be encouraged to seek peer support from other patients participating in the same exercise programme. Cardiac rehabilitation has four phases:

Phase 1 (2-5 days) starts during inpatient hospital stay, as soon as the patient's heart condition has stabilised. Patients are taught how to care for their heart while carrying out their basic daily activities during this phase.

Phase 2 (4-8 weeks) begins two to three weeks after hospital discharge. Patients will attend supervised exercise training sessions that include both aerobic and resistance exercises supervised by physiotherapists on a regular basis.

Phase 3 (6-8 weeks) focuses on intermediate maintenance through more supervised exercise classes.

By Phase 4, patients are expected to be able to exercise independently and continue to sustain lifelong healthy heart habits. Participants may also join the [NUH Heart Support Group](#) to continue exercising on their own with liked-minded individuals who have experienced similar heart problems for continued peer support.

Useful websites

[What is Cardiac Rehabilitation?](#)

[National University Heart Centre – Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme](#)

[Exercise-based cardiac rehabilitation for coronary heart disease](#)