

Heart & Stroke Presents...

Webinar Key Messages



Title: Practical virtual rehabilitation and self-management techniques during COVID-19 for people living with heart conditions to continue the recovery journey

Webinar Date: April 24, 2020

Topics Covered in Webinar

Information on COVID-19 is emerging at a very rapid pace and it is generating many appointment disruptions, issues with access to services, questions and concerns. Inpatient stays are being shortened- both acute care and inpatient rehabilitation. With limited outpatient services, access to in-person rehabilitation has become a challenge. People with heart conditions who are not yet referred, currently starting, part-way through or completing rehabilitation may be trying to cope with access issues; and seeking resources and supports available to them. This webinar focused on practical 'next steps' that people with lived experience can take to allow continuation of their rehabilitation efforts independently during COVID-19.

View Cardiac Rehabilitation [webinar here](#).

Refer to Heart & Stroke's Living well with heart disease booklet [here](#).

Romuald Mineyko, Nepean, Ont.

Perspectives from a man with lived cardiac rehabilitation experience

Romuald shares the following tips that helped him during cardiac rehabilitation and recovery:

- **Play an active role in your care/rehab plan:**
 - Write down your goals, challenges, strengths and successes; and share these with your rehabilitation team during each call/appointment.
 - These can often change during your rehabilitation journey, so it is important to be open and honest during each call/appointment.
- **Make each phone call/appointment with your care team count:**
 - Create an agenda noting the objectives of the call or appointment (yours and theirs)
 - Write down what you will need to relay or ask in order to meet those objectives.
- **Take ownership in your recovery:**
 - The healthcare team invested a great deal into your health. Now it is our responsibility to "follow through" with this investment and "make it count" by adhering to our care and rehab plan.

Dr. Paul Oh, *Senior Scientist at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute*

Guidance from a cardiovascular prevention & rehabilitation expert

- Dr. Oh notes that there is strong evidence indicating that rehabilitation programs are beneficial and help lower an individual's risk of having to return to hospital or of dying from heart disease or stroke.
- In addition to physical benefits, rehabilitation programs are also important for mental health and social connection too.
 - COVID-19 has disrupted the ability to physically connect with one another however, Dr. Oh encourages social connection while physically distancing through virtual cardiac rehabilitation.
- Virtual cardiac rehabilitation includes structured exercise, behavioural engagement and therapeutic education. It has been shown to be as good as in-person rehabilitation, and through virtual care we are able to provide many of the key elements of cardiac rehabilitation.
- Education is an important component throughout rehabilitation and recovery. A part of education is to assess health literacy, and for staff to adjust their approach to meet the patient's learning needs and style.
- Dr. Oh encourages you to continue the exercise prescription that you receive, and to maintain a frequency of about 5 days a week. If any new symptoms develop during your home exercise program, report those to your cardiac rehabilitation team right away.
- He notes that the disruptions of the pandemic are causing additional stress and it is important to acknowledge the way you are feeling and find ways to manage your stress.
- You can visit *Health e-University's Cardiac College* at [this link](#), for more information about cardiac rehabilitation.
- **Most importantly, do not ignore your heart: call 9-1-1 if you think you're having a heart attack.**

Gordon Fogg, *Reh-Fit Centre, Winnipeg*

Guidance from a clinical exercise physiologist

- Gord notes that with COVID-19 there have been some changes when it comes to cardiac rehabilitation; one of those changes is a shift to virtual delivery of care. Depending on the available resources at your rehabilitation site, some programs may not be operating at this time.
 - **Check with your care team to see what has changed, and if there are virtual cardiac rehabilitation offerings that you can access at this time.**
- **Two important ways to help prevent future cardiac problems and manage cardiovascular disease include:**
 1. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle- such as staying active and eating a balanced diet;

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2. Medication management- ensuring you are taking your prescribed medications as directed and speaking to your healthcare team about any medication questions or concerns.
- Generally, physical activity is safe, and supports good physical and mental health.
 - ** Check with your care team first to determine what physical activity is right and safe for you.*
 - Start with manageable bouts that work with what you have access to and where you are in your recovery journey.
 - Build on you progress gradually over time.

Gord emphasizes the importance of goal setting during rehabilitation:

- Keep track of what you are doing; write on a calendar, use an exercise log or other tracking.
- Create SMART goals to assist in your recovery journey:
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Time-bound

Questions to ask your health care team about your heart health during COVID-19:

- What should I know about my heart condition?
- What should I know about my medications?
- Where can I access additional support for nutrition, mental health, etc.
- Are there any activities I should AVOID?
 - Or should I limit how hard I push during my activity?
- How can I continue to progress my recovery at home?
 - Would I benefit from additional types of exercise?
- Are there any safety considerations I should follow?
- Can I continue participating in the things I am already doing?

Jennifer Harris, *Manager, cardiovascular disease & rehabilitation outreach programs, University of Ottawa Heart Institute-Ottawa*
Guidance from a cardiac rehabilitation specialist

Jennifer provides the top 10 practical tips on how to stay active during COVID-19:

**Always check with your health care team to determine what is safe and right for you.*

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1. **Get your heart pumping everyday;** focus on aerobic activity in bouts of 10 minutes or more. Do something that is repetitive; a great example here is walking.
2. **Work your muscles;** strength exercises and resistance training is important. You do not necessarily need equipment to do strength exercises. Aim to do this type of exercise 2 times a week.
 - An example of this would be standing up out of a chair and repeating that for 5-10 times; this will work your leg strength.
 - Another option is pushing up against a wall or table; which will work your arms, chest and back.
3. **Work on your balance.** Balance is important for overall fitness—challenge yourself; but be safe while doing it.
 - Practice balance at a countertop so you have something to grab onto should you require it. Practice by standing on one leg, and if that is easy, try bending the standing knee slightly; or try to close your eyes.
4. **Any exercise is great.** Although it is recommended that adults achieve 150 minutes of activity every week—research has shown us consistently that all exercise is good for your health. So even doing a little bit is better than nothing.
5. **Track your progress.** Set yourself some goals and track your progress by writing them down in a notebook, on a calendar, with a device like a pedometer, Fitbit, or other wearables. By logging your activity, we are more likely to accomplish our goals and it's a good visual reminder to keep us on track.
6. **Warm up and cool down.** A warmup prior to engaging in activity is important to help your muscles, joints and heart prepare for the upcoming movement you will be doing. This is also a time for you to check in with your body and determine what might be right for you on that day when it comes to movement. A cool down is intended for the same purpose, to finish off your activity session and see how you are feeling once finished.
 - For example, if you're feeling great during warm up, you may want to take your movement up a notch to moderate intensity.
7. **Listen to your body.** When engaging in any movement, be sure to listen to your body and relay how you are feeling during any virtual sessions with a health care provider—this way your therapist or care team can modify the movement to best suit you.
8. **Talk test.** This is a helpful tool to help decide if you're at the right level for exercise. We want to ensure that you can talk without having to stop to take a breath.
 - If you cannot talk without stopping to take a breath, this is an indication that the exercise is too difficult at this time.
9. **Stay social—virtually.** Try to stay connected to others virtually. We know that social connection during recovery is important. Whether it's by phone, video call or email check-ins; there are different ways to stay in touch.

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10. **Sit less and move more.** Break up long periods of sitting, even if you are exercising 30 minutes each day, you still need to be moving more throughout the day. Try to be mindful of this; stand up and walk more.

- Jennifer also notes to locate a Cardiac Rehabilitation Centre near you, visit the *Cardiac Health Foundation of Canada* [here](#).
- *The Ottawa Heart Institute* also has plenty of COVID-19 related resources, [visit here](#).

Please visit www.heartandstroke.ca for more information about heart conditions, stroke, vascular cognitive impairment and COVID-19.

COVID-19 makes our fight more urgent than ever. [Donate now](#) to help those at greater risk.