SCARSTORIES · A LITTLE COMPANY ON THE WAY

Exercise while you wait: what's safe, what isn't

Movement is good medicine — but while you wait, the rules are different for everyone. The short version: your team's advice wins, and your own symptoms are the best monitor you have.

Preparing and waiting

> Educational content.

The honest answer is that there is no single list of safe exercises for everyone waiting on a heart answer — it depends on what you've been through, what your symptoms are, and what your team knows about your tests. But there are patterns most people can recognise, and one rule that beats every list: nothing that brings on symptoms, ever.

Usually fine for most people

- Walking at a comfortable pace, at the time of day you feel best. This is the most recommended form of movement in most cardiac waiting periods.
- Gentle daily activity around the house — stairs if you already manage them without trouble.
- Stretching and easy movement that doesn't raise your heart rate noticeably.

Usually worth avoiding until you're cleared

- Starting a new intense exercise programme — now is not the time to begin marathon training or a new high-intensity class.
- Heavy lifting — weights at high load, or moving furniture in ways you wouldn't normally.
- Competitive or interval sports that spike the heart rate fast.
- Cold-water swimming, or sudden bursts of exertion in extreme heat or cold.
- Any exercise you're doing "to prove the heart is fine" — that's testing, not training, and it's your team's job.

The rule of thumb

If an activity brings on chest pain or pressure, unusual breathlessness, dizziness, or a racing heart, stop immediately. That's not failure — it's information, and it belongs to your team. Write down what you were doing and what you felt, and tell them. "Pushing through" is a training mantra for athletes; it has no place in a waiting period.

What to ask your team

- Is there an effort level or heart rate that's safe for me right now?
- Which of my usual activities should I stop, and which can I keep?
- When will it be safe to restart my sport or gym routine — and how do I restart?

> **Take it to your team**
>
> Tell them exactly what movement you currently do, and let them set the boundary. Ask for something concrete: "walking at a comfortable pace is fine, nothing that leaves you breathless" — that's easier to follow than "take it easy".

> **Call for help if**
>
> Symptoms come on during activity — chest pain or pressure, breathlessness, dizziness, feeling you might faint. Stop at once and call your team, or emergency services if it's severe or doesn't settle within a few minutes of resting.

> I stopped my gym sessions the day my chest tightened on the treadmill. I told my team, and they said: good — that's exactly the information we needed. Not one person told me I was weak.

A last word

Movement is still yours. Walking, stretching, being outside — most people keep some of it, and it helps. Just let your team set the ceiling, and let your symptoms set the floor. What's safe for you, in your exact situation, is their call — made with you.

Questions to take to my team

- [ ] Is there an effort level or heart rate that's safe for me right now?

- [ ] Which of my usual activities should I stop, and which can I keep?

- [ ] When will it be safe to restart my sport or gym routine — and how do I restart?

For discussion and personal reference. Your care team’s individual instructions take priority. For an emergency, contact your local emergency service; do not wait for a community reply.