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### **Recovering from heart disease? Rewards and challenges lie ahead**

**By Chris Sulway**

Heart disease is a growing epidemic in the Gulf Region due to obesity, diabetes, smoking, and a lack of exercise. According to the World Health Organisation, 16.7 million people died of cardiovascular diseases around the globe in 2002 and the number of fatalities from heart disease is projected to rise to more than 24 million a year by 2030. Perhaps even more importantly, improved medical care means many people will *survive* a heart attack and will need to find ways to alter their lives to adjust to the changed capacity of their hearts, or to insure they don't have another attack.

If you've had a heart attack, heart surgery, or have a heart condition then your doctors may recommend participating in a cardiac rehabilitation program. Although exercising may be the last thing you are interested in after an attack or surgery, it may be the ticket to full recovery and a better quality of life. Cardiac rehabilitation can steer you through fear and anxiety as you return to an active lifestyle, with more motivation and energy to do the things you enjoy. Cardiac rehabilitation is a customized program of exercise and education with the goals of helping you regain strength, preventing your condition from worsening, and reducing your risk of future heart problems.

Cardiac rehabilitation should be done by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals and has four main components: medical evaluation, lifestyle education, psychosocial support, and physical activity programs.

A physiotherapist is an important member of a cardiac rehabilitation team, along with a cardiologist, dietician, and psychologist. The physiotherapist will design and monitor an individualized exercise program that will be safe and effective. Don't worry if you've never exercised before, the physiotherapist will make sure the program moves at a pace you are comfortable with. Ideally, a cardiac rehabilitation program should begin while you're still in the hospital; it will include nonstrenuous activities such as sitting up in bed, range-of-motion exercises, and basic activities of daily living. When you're out of the hospital, cardiac rehabilitation programs typically last from two to 12 weeks on an outpatient basis. During this phase, you gradually increase your activity level under the close supervision of a physiotherapist who will suggest exercises you can safely do at home, such as walking and gentle stretching. You also learn about eating a healthy diet, quitting smoking, coping with your condition, resuming sexual activity, and finding social support.

The final stage of cardiac rehabilitation is a long-term maintenance program -- something to follow for the rest of your life. By this point, you probably will have developed your own exercise routine at home or at a local gym. You may remain under medical supervision during this time, particularly if you have special health concerns. Education about diet and nutrition, lifestyle and weight loss may continue, as well as counselling and heart healthy behaviours. For best success, make sure your exercise and lifestyle practices become lifelong habits.

If you've had a heart attack or heart surgery, or if you have another heart condition, ask your doctor or physiotherapist about joining a cardiac rehabilitation program. Studies show they can help you live longer, and one of the most valuable benefits of cardiac rehabilitation is an improvement in your overall quality of life. You're likely to come out of your cardiac rehabilitation program feeling healthier and happier than before.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at [www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com](http://www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com)

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