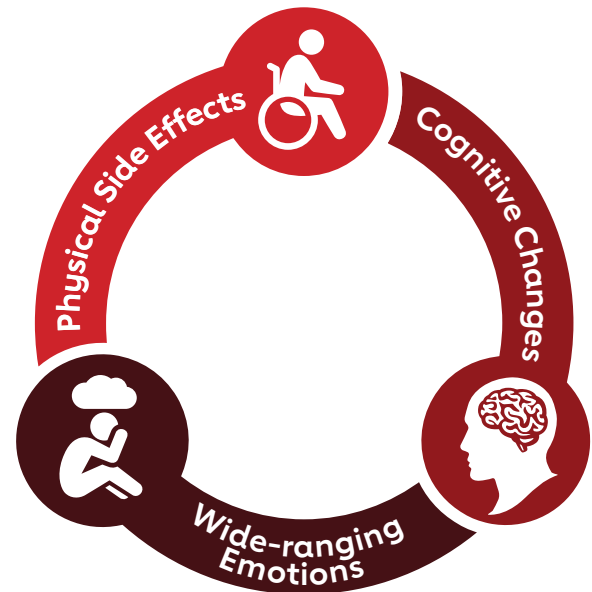




What Is Recovery Like After a Cardiac Arrest?

Surviving a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is a life-changing event, not only for you but also for the people around you. Before you leave the hospital, you and your family members will need to prepare for your care and recovery at home.

Your heart and body have been through a major event and need time to recover. You may find changes in your physical and mental abilities over the next year while you recover. Knowing what to expect and how to deal with things may help you and your family handle them better.



What physical side effects may I have?

Many cardiac arrest survivors have reported these physical side effects:

- Physical fatigue
- Muscle weakness
- Pain from chest compressions
- Changes in vision or speech
- Problems with fine motor skills
- Trouble swallowing
- Difficulty sleeping
- Low sex drive or sperm count
- Medication side effects

All of these are normal. Most survivors report their side effects get better over the first year.

How might my brain function be affected?

During your cardiac arrest, your brain may not have had as much oxygen as it needed. This may result in some cognitive changes during your recovery. Many survivors have reported the following brain-related issues after their SCA:

- Lack of focus or attention
- Short- and long-term memory issues
- Lack of planning and organizational skills
- Reduced ability to learn new things
- Language problems — understanding speech and speaking skills
- Vision problems

All of these issues are normal. Most survivors report their brain-related changes get better over the first year. Some survivors have more severe deficits and require long-term support.

Is it normal to have a range of emotions following a SCA?

Yes, it's common for people to feel a wide range of emotions following a cardiac arrest.

Fear, anxiety, depression and loneliness are some common feelings. These feelings are linked to changes in life after a SCA. These may include:

- Trouble being in the same roles and activities you had before
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of another cardiac arrest
- Increased dependence on others

These feelings are often contrasted with feelings of joy, elation and gratitude for being alive.

If you need help dealing with your emotions, know that you're not alone. You can discuss your feelings with trusted friends, religious leaders or family. You can also ask your health care team for support.

(continued)



What Is Recovery Like After a Cardiac Arrest?

What else can I do?

Some SCA survivors might be referred to a community cardiac rehabilitation program. While this can be helpful, some survivors say it does not apply to their situation. Check to see if your area has a SCA survivor support group you can join or see if there are online options that might be a better fit.

Survivors often find it helpful to talk to other survivors who have been through what they have. Even with the best intentions, family and friends sometimes don't understand how survivors are feeling. There are online communities dedicated to connecting survivors of SCA. Some include:

- Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation
- Survivors of SCA Facebook Group
- AHA Survivor Forum

What follow up with my health care team will I need?

It is very important to follow up with your primary care professional to ensure they have the information about your event and recovery care. They also may be able to refer you to other resources you might find helpful.

Cardiac arrest affects each person differently. Speak with your health care team about any abnormal symptoms you experience or other changes you are going through.

You may want to ask:

- Will I be on these medications forever?
- When can I return to work?
- Can I exercise or return to my normal activities?
- When can I be intimate with my partner?
- When can I drive?
- How can I prevent this from happening again?
- Are there other health care professionals I need to see, such as a physical therapist, nutrition specialist or psychiatrist?
- Are my family members at higher risk of cardiac arrest?

What about my family and friends?

It is important to remember that family members, especially those you live with, have also "survived" this life-changing event with you. You may not see it, but they are struggling too, and they are trying their best to understand and support you. They also may need support.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How long will this range of emotions last?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.