



What Happens After Heart Surgery?

What are the ICU and CCU?

In a hospital, ICU stands for Intensive Care Unit. CCU stands for Coronary Care Unit. These are places with special equipment and highly trained nurses and doctors. This is where patients go after open-heart surgery or a heart attack.

You're watched around the clock. The care you get here will help you recover safely and quickly. You may stay for several days, depending on the type of heart surgery and the time you need to recover. Then you may go to a regular hospital room.



In ICU, patients are watched very closely by highly trained healthcare professionals.

What happens in the ICU?

- You'll wake up and might feel confused at first.
- It's noisy and busy. The pace is fast and the lights are always on.
- It's normal to lose track of time while you're there.
- You'll be hooked up to many tubes and wires.
- Your wrists may be strapped down lightly so you don't pull out any tubes or wires by mistake.

What are the tubes and wires for?

- You'll be hooked up to machines so nurses can check your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and other vital signs.
- You may have a tube in your mouth and throat to help you breathe. It's uncomfortable and you can't talk with it, but nurses will help you communicate.

- The breathing tube will stay in until you can breathe on your own — usually a few hours. Tubes are used to give medicine, drain fluids and take blood samples.
- There may be small wires hooked up to your lower chest to pace your heart.

Can my family visit?

- A few hours after surgery, close family members can see you in the ICU for short visits.
- They should expect you to look pale and puffy. This is normal after surgery.
- They should expect to see lots of tubes and wires hooked up to you and the machines that monitor you.
- The staff will tell your family how you are doing.

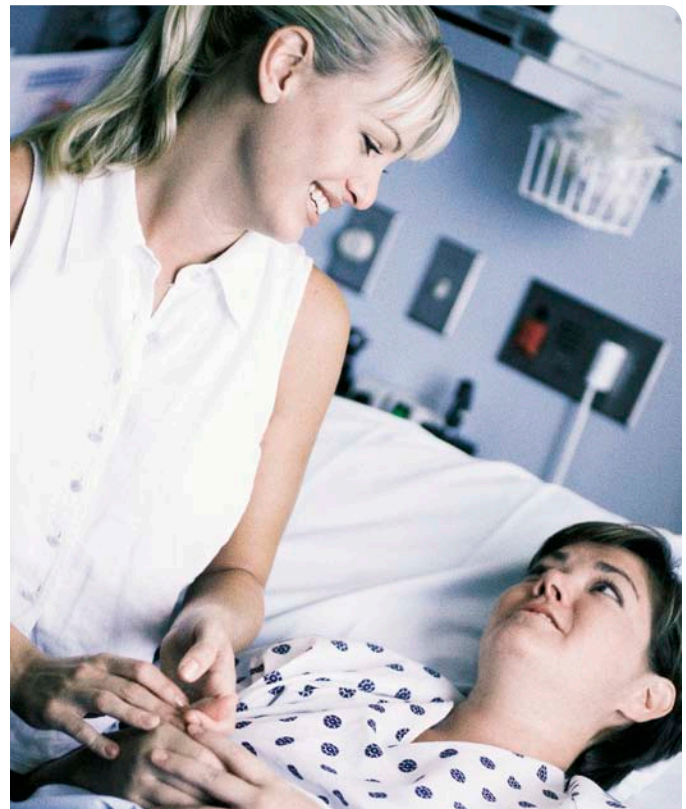
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- Family visits and support may help you recover.
- Family members can help by touching and talking to you. Family can also help you communicate with the staff.

What should my family know?

- When someone has surgery, it's normal for their family members to feel anxious, upset, angry or afraid.
- Their nerves may be on edge and they may be tired. They should talk about these feelings and not keep them in.
- They should take care of themselves, too, with regular meals and rest.



Your family can help you recover by touching and talking to you.

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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

When will I leave the ICU?

How long will the breathing tube stay in?

My Questions:

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