

What is cardiac rehabilitation?

Cardiac rehabilitation is a personalised programme designed to support those living with a heart condition, as well as help individuals recovering from a heart event or procedure. Most programmes include exercise, lifestyle advice and support tailored to individual needs.

You may be offered the choice of attending in-person, remotely from home or by accessing web or app-based resources. Key components include exercise sessions, information and advice about lifestyle changes, peer support, and emotional well-being. Cardiac rehabilitation can significantly improve heart health and overall quality of life.

What does cardiac rehabilitation involve?



Fig. 1 | Components of comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation. A schematic summary of the major components of comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation. Adapted by permission from BMJ Publishing Group Limited. [Advances in rehabilitation for chronic diseases: improving health outcomes and function. Richardson C.R., Franklin B., Moy M.L., Jackson E.A.2019]

Evidence focusing on heart failure suggests the potential benefits of cardiac rehabilitation in improving health for people diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, which can include:

- Improved exercise capacity:** Regular, supervised exercise can for some people improve their overall health and fitness levels.
- Enhanced quality of life:** Emotional wellbeing support and education about lifestyle changes can in some people reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Reduction in hospital care:** Regular, structured rehabilitation programmes can reduce symptoms and help improve overall wellbeing, which may reduce the likelihood of needing to go to hospital as often.
- Living longer:** Taking part in cardiac rehabilitation can, for some people, help them to live longer and reduce their cardiomyopathy-related symptoms.

What are the potential benefits of participating in cardiac rehabilitation?

Taking part in cardiac rehabilitation can offer benefits for those with cardiomyopathy and/or heart failure. Benefits may include:

- Improved physical fitness:** Regular, supervised exercise can help improve cardiovascular health and overall physical stamina and strength.
- Confidence in being active:** Cardiac rehabilitation can help you gain knowledge and confidence in how to exercise safely and effectively.
- Healthier lifestyle:** Cardiac rehabilitation can support you in adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle, which can help to prevent or manage other health conditions e.g. Diabetes/pre-diabetes.
- Improvements to mental health:** Education and emotional wellbeing information and support can help some people to manage anxiety, low mood and stress, and improve overall emotional well-being.



- 5. Patient empowerment:** Gaining knowledge around managing your condition through lifestyle adaptations, medication management, and recognising and managing symptoms can lead to an informed and empowered person.
- 6. Peer support:** The opportunity to meet other people diagnosed with cardiomyopathy and/or heart failure and an opportunity to talk with peers about living with cardiomyopathy.

Who will I see at cardiac rehabilitation?

At the cardiac rehabilitation sessions you might speak to a specialist nurse, exercise physiologist (specialist in exercise), physiotherapist, dietician, counsellor or psychologist and an administrator.

Where does cardiac rehabilitation fit into my healthcare journey?

Cardiac rehabilitation can have an important role in supporting your overall wellbeing and forms part of your care pathway. Phases of cardiac rehabilitation may include:

- **Early:** Begins during any hospital stay and focuses on early mobilisation and recovery advice following any procedures. This may be followed up by phone after you return home.
- **Core:** A structured programme of exercise, health education and support for behaviour change. It can be delivered in-person or remotely, or a hybrid of both. This may last from 6-12 weeks in duration.
- **Long-term/maintenance:** Ongoing support for exercise and lifestyle change, often in a community setting.

Home-based cardiac rehabilitation:

The most widely used programme in the UK is the Heart Manual. This is a six-week intervention that uses written material and a relaxation CD. It is delivered by a trained healthcare facilitator who makes home visits and provides telephone support. This has been shown to be just as effective as centre-based programmes. Your cardiac rehabilitation team may offer you access to other web or app-based programmes instead of, or in addition to, in-person sessions if this is your preference.

How do I access cardiac rehabilitation?

Referral

Your GP, specialist nurse or cardiologist can refer you to your local cardiac rehabilitation programme, or you can refer yourself.

Self-referral

Enter your postcode to locate your nearest service:

www.cardiac-rehabilitation.net/site/cardiac-rehab.htm

How can I prepare for cardiac rehabilitation?

- 1. Consult your doctor or specialist nurse:** Confirm with your healthcare professional that your heart condition is stable and you are ready to participate in cardiac rehabilitation, then request a referral to your local cardiac rehabilitation service. Your doctor or nurse may provide specific exercise guidance based on your condition.
- 2. Set goals:** Work with your cardiac rehabilitation team to set realistic goals for your heart health. This might include improving your fitness, managing stress, or adopting a healthier diet.
- 3. Medication management:** Make sure you have a list of all your medications, including prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbal treatments, and vitamins. Bring this list to your cardiac rehabilitation sessions.
- 4. Dress comfortably:** Wear comfortable, exercise-appropriate clothing and shoes. This will help you participate in physical activities more easily.
- 5. Stay hydrated:** Bring a water bottle to stay hydrated during your sessions.
- 6. Mental preparation:** Be ready to take an active role in your recovery. This includes being open to learning about lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, that can improve your heart health.
- 7. Emergency plan:** Your cardiac rehabilitation team will know what to do should you experience new or worsening symptoms. When exercising independently, keep emergency contact numbers handy and understand when to seek immediate medical help.



What information do I need to provide to my cardiac rehabilitation practitioner?

It might be helpful to provide your cardiac rehabilitation practitioner with some information resources about your condition and exercising with cardiomyopathy.

To download our information resources, visit:

www.cardiomyopathy.org/information-resources

Your cardiac rehabilitation team might find a copy of your most recent clinic/consultant letter helpful so that they have your recent clinical information available. If you have an implanted device take as much information as you have for the practitioner to see.




What do I do if cardiac rehabilitation is not available in my local area?

- We know that despite the benefits, cardiac rehabilitation might not be available for people diagnosed with cardiomyopathy. You can contact your GP, cardiologist or specialist nurse and ask to be referred.
- Get in touch at services@cardiomyopathy.org to tell us about your experiences.

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