

# Transitions in Care

Patient Resource Guide



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## **Online Version Also Available**

This self-help guidebook is a tool you can use to help manage your heart health. Please visit [www.abc-patient.com/care](http://www.abc-patient.com/care) for an interactive version of this guidebook.

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# Introduction

Getting back into your normal routine after a hospitalization is something to look forward to. You're probably excited to return home—sleep in your own bed, eat with your family—but it's important to understand your treatment plan before you leave the hospital.

This guide will help you understand what you need to do before you're discharged from the hospital and what you should do at home to make your transition out of the hospital go as smoothly as possible.

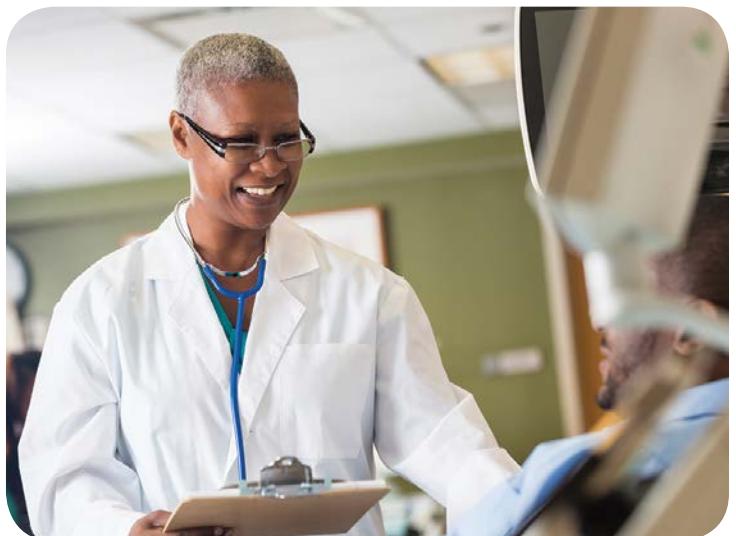
## Chapter 1

# Before You Leave the Hospital

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

When your doctor determines that you're ready to return home, you will be given discharge instructions. These instructions may include information on how to take care of bandages, medications you should take, exercises to do, and other home care information.

Before you go home, you should be very clear on what your limitations are and whether or not you will need special care, assistance, or equipment to get back on your feet.



## Be sure to ask your doctor the following questions:

- What medicines will I take and for how long?
- How do they differ from what I was taking before?
- Who do I call if I experience issues before I see my doctor?
- In what instances should I contact a doctor or nurse, or seek immediate medical attention?
- When and under what circumstances am I expected to return to the hospital?
- Will my doctor receive information on the hospitalization?
- What are special instructions regarding care of incisions?
- How long should I expect pain?
- Are there things I should do every day, such as weigh myself?
- Do I have any special dietary restrictions?
- Is there a special clinic (heart failure, diabetes, cardiac rehab) or new medical provider I will be following up with?
- When should I follow up with you or another new medical provider for this condition?
- Is there any kind of follow-up therapy?
- Should someone help me once I get home, until I can resume normal activities?
- How soon before I can resume routine activities (driving, housework, lawn care, or bathing, for example)?
- When can I resume exercise and other more vigorous activities?
- How long before I can resume sexual activity?
- How soon before I can return to work?

*Use the Notes area on page 15 to write down any other questions or concerns you may have.*



**It's a good idea to have a friend or family member with you to help you remember important information and to ask any questions you may not think of. Be sure to ask your doctor who you should call if you have questions once you're home, and write down the phone number.**

## Understanding Your Medications

Your doctor or nurse will review your medications with you before you leave the hospital. You may have new medicines to take, and the dosages of those you took before may have changed.

Depending on your medical condition, you may need to take a blood-thinning medication. Your doctor will explain what it does and its side effects, and do routine tests at your follow-up appointments to make sure your dosage is correct.

For each drug you take, make sure you know:

- The name of the drug and the dose (for example, 200 mg once a day)
- When and how to take it (for example, with or without food)
- Why you are taking the drug (some drugs have multiple uses)
- What to do if you miss a dose
- How your medications have changed, if you were taking any before you stayed in the hospital
- Common side effects, and particularly side effects you should notify your doctor about (such as cough, nightmares, or muscle pain)



**Ask your doctor or nurse for a list of your medications or have a loved one write them down to keep in your purse or wallet (including dosages), so you'll have it for ready reference.**

### If you are taking a blood thinner, call your doctor if you have:

- A serious fall, or you hit your head
- Pain, discomfort, or swelling at an injection or injury site
- A lot of bruising on your skin
- A lot of bleeding, such as nosebleeds or bleeding gums
- Bloody or dark brown urine or black, tarry stool
- Headache, dizziness, or weakness
- Become pregnant or are planning to become pregnant
- An infection or fever, or an illness that is causing vomiting or diarrhea



Source: *MedlinePlus*

### If you have surgery

## What to Expect During Recovery

Your recovery and recovery time will depend on your medical condition, your overall health before surgery, and any complications you may be getting over or recovering from.

Your doctor will give you instructions on how to:

- Care for your incisions as they heal
- Recognize signs of infection or other complications
- Take your medications (how often, with food, etc.)
- Recognize potential side effects from medications
- Recognize a worsening condition (such as weight gain for heart failure)
- Cope with the after-effects of surgery. After-effects, including muscle pain or swelling, are normal. Other after-effects include loss of appetite, constipation, mood swings, depression, and problems sleeping. These usually go away with time.

You will also be told about scheduling follow-up appointments, medications, and situations when you should call your doctor right away.

# Chapter 2

# When You Return Home

## Medications

Once you're back home after surgery, fill any new prescriptions as soon as possible. It's a good idea to use the same pharmacy for all your medications.



**Share your updated medication list with your pharmacist, so he or she can help you avoid dangerous drug interactions. If you are taking a lot of medications, consider getting a pill organizer or dispenser. Call your doctor if you have side effects or other concerns.**

Some pharmaceutical companies offer financial assistance programs for the drugs they manufacture. Visit [www.medicare.gov/pharmaceutical-assistance-program](http://www.medicare.gov/pharmaceutical-assistance-program) to see if the medications you are taking are eligible.



# Medication Safety

## Take Medicine as Prescribed

- Take your medicine regularly and according to your doctor's instructions.
- Don't skip doses or stop taking medication without first consulting with your doctor.

## Keep a Medication List

- Write down what you're taking and keep the list with you. Give a copy to a friend or loved one in case of emergency.
- Record the medicine's name, how often and what dosage you take, and note when you take each drug.

## Be Aware of Potential Interactions

- Interactions can occur when one drug affects how another drug works; a medical condition makes a certain drug potentially harmful; a food or non-alcoholic drink reacts with a drug; or medicine interacts with an alcoholic drink.
- Carefully read drug facts labels on over-the-counter drugs and the information that comes with your prescription medications.
- If you're seeing multiple doctors, tell each one about all of your medications and supplements. You also can ask your pharmacist about potential interactions.



## Review Medications with Your Doctor

- Review your medications with your doctor to confirm which are still necessary and which you can stop taking (if any).
- If a certain medication seems out of your budget, ask your doctor whether there is a cheaper, and still effective, alternative or a medication assistance program.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

# Exercise

Exercise is essential for maintaining your health, and can also improve your overall sense of well-being.

Even low-to-moderate intensity activities, for as little as 30 minutes a day, can be beneficial. These activities may include:

- |                    |                               |                 |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Pleasure walking | • Yard work                   | • Dancing       |
| • Climbing stairs  | • Moderate-to-heavy housework | • Home exercise |
| • Gardening        |                               |                 |

Don't attempt these activities, however, until your doctor says you are ready for them. You should slowly increase the time you exercise and type of activity you do according to your doctor's instructions. Enrolling in a cardiac rehabilitation program (see Chapter 3) will help you to exercise safely and at a pace that's right for you.

# Eating Healthy

You want to be as healthy as possible after your heart surgery. Eating a nutritious diet is a proven way to reduce the risk for heart disease. Here are some tips to help you:

- Eat 2 cups fresh fruits and 2-1/2 to 3 cups vegetables every day.
- Limit saturated and trans fats by using olive oil or other vegetable oils instead of butter or margarine. Remember also to limit your total fat intake to less than 30% of your daily calories.
- Eat more chicken and fish and less red meat.
- Eat 6 to 8 ounces of grains, of which at least half should be from whole-grain bread and cereal.
- Limit or eliminate fast foods, which are often loaded with salt, sugar, and fats.

**20 oz. juice drink = 23 sugar packets**

**16 oz. energy drink = 17 sugar packets**

**20 oz. soda = 22 sugar packets**

- If you drink alcohol, do so moderately. That means no more than 2 drinks a day if you're a man, 1 if you're a woman.
- Limit your salt and sodium intake to 2,400 mg per day (about one teaspoon).
- Get the equivalent of 3 cups of fat-free or low-fat milk or dairy products (or soy, rice, or almond milk for people who can't tolerate lactose) every day. Milk and milk alternatives must have 130 calories or less per 8 fluid oz.



# Top Sources of Sodium

- Breads and rolls
- Poultry
- Pasta dishes
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Soups
- Meat dishes
- Pizza
- Sandwiches
- Snacks
- Cheese

Source: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

## Live Smoke-free

**Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease.**

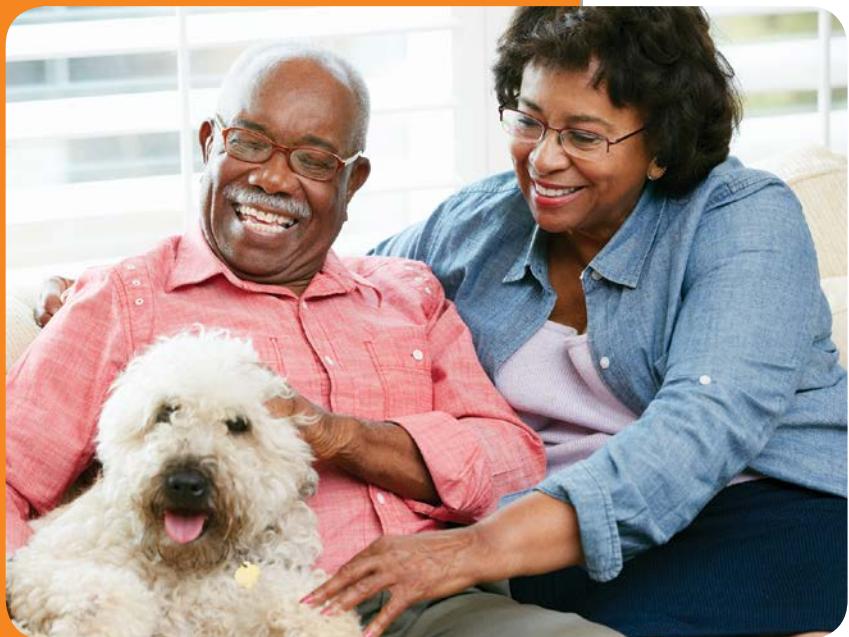
- Decide to quit and set a quit date. Try again if you fail. Successful quitters often tried many times before they were able to quit.
- Ask your doctor for information about aids to help you stop smoking, like a nicotine patch or inhaler and a counseling or support program.
- E-cigarettes (electronic cigarettes) are not an acceptable alternative.
- All forms of tobacco contain nicotine, which will damage the heart and blood vessels.  
Smoking causes additional damage to the lungs.

## Learn to Relax

**Constant anger and stress can damage your heart.**

- Try to be positive instead of negative in your outlook on life.
- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly and breathe deeply.
- Take time for yourself each day. Read a book, listen to music, or enjoy a hobby.
- Taking part in yoga, Pilates, tai chi, meditation, reiki, etc. can be worthwhile and done in addition to your prescribed therapy.

**Your return home from the hospital often signals a change has occurred in your health. It's not unusual to feel some anxiety or depression with this change. You should feel free to contact your spiritual advisor or a mental health professional.**



# Chapter 3

# Follow-up Care

## Medical appointments

After you return home, you will likely have follow-up medical appointments with your doctor. During these visits you may have blood tests, an EKG (electrocardiogram), or a stress test. These will evaluate your heart to see how well it is performing after your surgery, procedure, or hospital stay.

It's important to schedule any follow-up medical appointments your doctor recommends, as these visits can help you manage the condition that led to your hospital visit in the first place. They can also make you less likely to return due to an emergency.

Make sure all your doctors are aware of your health status (often a phone call will do), particularly new conditions, changes in medication, and additional procedures needed in the future. This is especially important if you will have new procedures performed, as the medications you take may need to be adjusted.

- Know how to reach your doctor after hours in case of emergency.
- Do not be afraid to be an advocate for your own health.
- Do not keep "secrets" from your doctor.
- Have a friend or family member accompany you.

You may also consider joining a support group, such as Mended Hearts, or visiting a specialty clinic (heart failure, diabetes, nutrition, etc.).

# Therapy/Cardiac Rehab

Your doctor may recommend that you enroll in a cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program after your surgery, medical procedure or hospital stay. Cardiac rehab is a medically supervised program that educates heart patients to increase physical fitness and reduce the risk of future/recurrent heart problems. Your program will be designed to meet your specific needs.

These programs will educate you on heart-healthy living, show you exercises you can do to increase your physical fitness, and counsel you in ways to reduce stress and return to an active life. It can also, optimally, help you adjust your medications and cardiac devices. Working with your cardiac rehab team is important. Share your questions and concerns with them; they will help you reach your goals.

## Cardiac rehab can help you:

- Recover after a heart attack or heart surgery.
- Prevent future hospital stays, heart problems, and death related to heart problems.
- Address risk factors that can lead to coronary heart disease and other heart problems. These risk factors include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, overweight or obesity, diabetes, smoking, lack of physical activity, and depression and other emotional health concerns.
- Adopt healthy lifestyle changes. These changes may include following a heart-healthy diet, being physically active, and learning how to manage stress.
- Improve your health and quality of life.

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



# Chapter 4

# Information for Caregivers

## Encouraging Healthy Changes

As a caregiver, you can help your loved one or patient make healthy changes to their diet and lifestyle. Change occurs when people are ready to embrace it, but rarely happens overnight. We are all prone to false starts and setbacks. Change doesn't always feel great but the benefits are seen in the long run. Encourage healthy change by being physically active, following the doctor's instructions and choosing heart-healthy foods to eat.

Your loved one may need assistance in keeping track of the medicines they need to take. Help them to stay on schedule and make sure they don't run out of the medications they need. Consider using a pill dispenser or making a medication chart to help stay organized.

You can also help by accompanying them to doctor's appointments (driving is restricted with certain medical conditions) and taking notes on what the doctor advises. There may be questions you want to ask on behalf of your loved one, and you can help them understand what the doctor says about their recovery and treatment.

## Signs and Symptoms to Watch For

As your loved one recovers, he or she may experience side effects from surgery, medications, or their medical condition. Some of these are normal and go away as healing takes place. It's sometimes difficult to know exactly what the issue is caused by. If an unusual symptom or disturbing trend develops, it's best to document it (in writing) and report it to the doctor for advice. Include when you first noticed the symptom, how often it occurs, what it's associated with, and what seems to make it better.

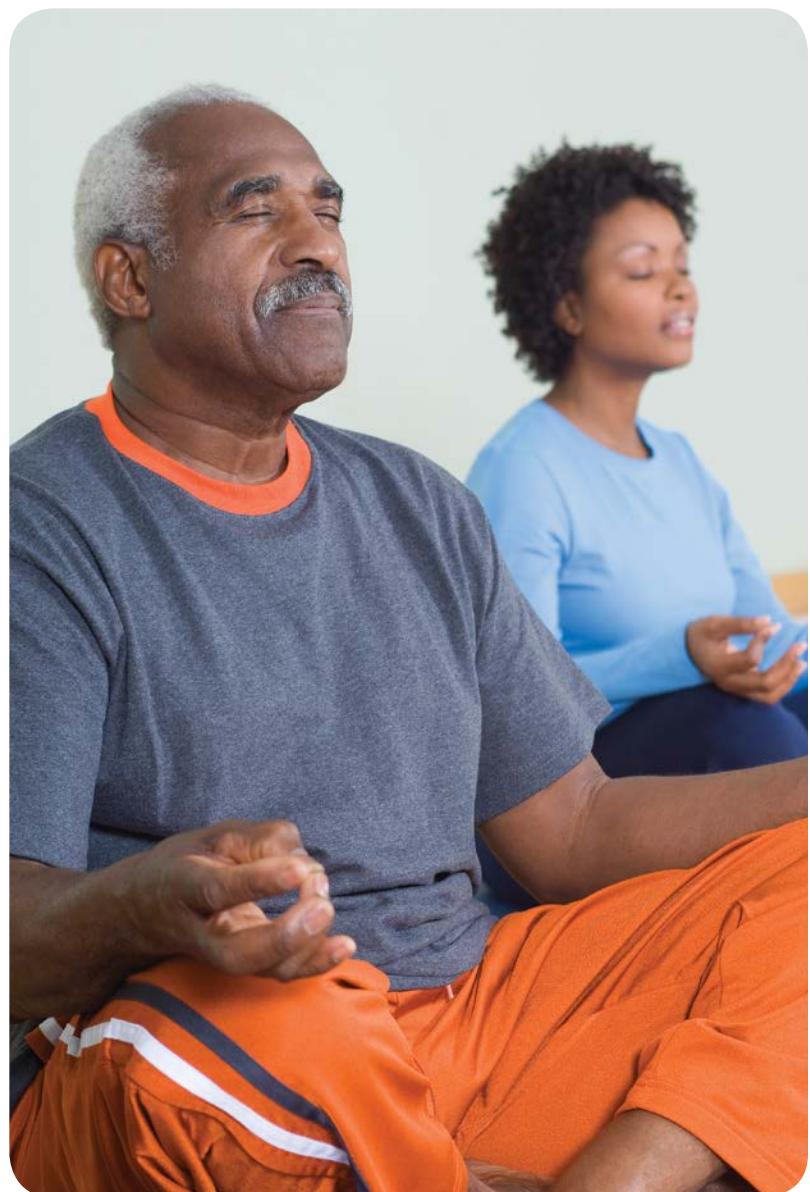
There are more serious symptoms to watch for, however. Call your loved one's doctor immediately if he or she has any of the following:

- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Swelling, or rapid weight gain
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain with increased activity
- A change in the usual regularity of their heartbeat, or an unusually fast heartbeat
- Fever above 100°F
- Signs of infection (redness, swelling, drainage, or warmth) at or near incision sites

## Caring for Yourself

As a caregiver, you want what's best for your loved one; but don't neglect your own health and well-being. Here's some advice for taking care of yourself:

- **Maintain your physical health.** Get at least some exercise each day: You'll sleep better, lower your stress, and have more energy. Nourish yourself with healthy foods.
- **Remember your physical safety.** Follow safe procedures when assisting your loved one to prevent back injuries and falls.
- **Get enough sleep.** You may feel a difference immediately.
- **Seek help for anxiety and depression.** Counseling or medications can often be effective in curbing the feelings of sadness often brought about by the changes in health of a loved one.
- **Take time to rest and relax.** Read a book. Spend time with a friend. Get out and about. Ask family members, neighbors, friends, and others to help.
- **Be serious about seeking support.** If someone asks, "Is there a way I can help?," bring out a to-do list of errands, meal preparations, or visits with your loved one. It's especially important to allow ALL family members an opportunity to assist in the care of their loved one.



# Glossary

**Blood pressure:** The amount of force blood exerts against the walls of your blood vessels, often an indicator of how hard the heart must pump.

**Blood thinner:** A medicine that reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke by reducing the formation of clots in your arteries, veins, or heart.

**Cholesterol:** A fatty substance that can build up within artery walls. Some is made by the body; some enters the body through foods you eat. In people with heart disease, the level of cholesterol in the blood is often too high.

**Coronary heart disease (CHD):** A condition that occurs when the blood vessels that supply oxygenated blood to the heart muscle gradually become narrowed or blocked by plaque deposits. Also known as coronary artery disease (CAD).

**Diabetes:** A condition in which your body doesn't make enough insulin to handle the sugar in the blood, or the body can't use the insulin it makes, or both.

**Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG):** A test that records the way electrical signals move through the heart.

**Heart disease:** A disease in which damage to the heart or the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart keeps the heart from working properly.

**High blood pressure (hypertension):** A disease in which blood pushes with too much force against artery walls as it moves through the arteries. This increased force damages the arteries over time.

**Over-the-counter medication:** Medicine for minor problems that can be purchased without a prescription from your doctor.

**Sodium:** An element needed by the body to function properly. Salt contains sodium. Too much sodium in your diet can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and other complications.

**Trans fat:** A type of fat found in french fries and other fast food, snack foods (such as chips and cookies), and some margarines and shortenings. This is the worst fat for your heart and should be avoided. It increases LDL and has been associated with increased risk of coronary heart disease.

# Notes

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# Resources

## **Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc. (ABC)**

800-753-9222 • [www.abcardio.org](http://www.abcardio.org)

Cardiovascular Risk Assessment Tool:

<http://abcardio.uat.staywellsolutionsonline.com/InteractiveTools/RiskAssessments/>

## **American College of Cardiology (ACC)**

800-253-4636, ext. 5603 • [www.acc.org](http://www.acc.org)

## **American Diabetes Association (ADA)**

703-549-1500 800-DIABETES • [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

## **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

800-366-1655 • [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

## **American Heart Association (AHA)**

1-800-242-8721 • [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

## **American Stroke Association**

a division of The American Heart Association

888-4STROKE (888-478-7653)

[www.StrokeAssociation.org](http://www.StrokeAssociation.org)

## **Association of Black Psychologists**

202-722-0808 • [www.abpsi.org](http://www.abpsi.org)

## **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality**

[www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

## **Calorie Control Council**

[www.caloriecontrol.org](http://www.caloriecontrol.org)

## **Cardiosmart**

[www.cardiosmart.org](http://www.cardiosmart.org)

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

800-311-3435 • [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## **Clinical Trials**

[www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)

## **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**

[www.fda.gov/ForPatients/Illness/Cardiovascular/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ForPatients/Illness/Cardiovascular/default.htm)

## **MedlinePlus**

[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

## **Medicare**

[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

## **Mended Hearts**

[www.mendedhearts.org](http://www.mendedhearts.org)

## **Million Hearts**

[www.millionhearts.hhs.gov](http://www.millionhearts.hhs.gov)

## **National Alliance for Caregiving**

[www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org)

## **National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC)**

800-860-8747 • [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

## **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**

NHLBI Information Center

301-592-8573 • [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

## **National Lipid Association**

<https://www.lipid.org>

## **National Institutes of Health**

[www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)

## **National Medical Association**

888-662-7497 • [www.nmanet.org](http://www.nmanet.org)

## **National Organization of Rare Diseases (NORD)**

[www.rarediseases.org](http://www.rarediseases.org)

## **National Stroke Association**

800-STROKES (800-787-6537) • [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)

## **National Transitions of Care Coalition**

<http://www.ntocc.org/>

## **National Women's Health Information Center**

[www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

## **Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association (PCNA)**

[www.pcna.net](http://www.pcna.net)

## **The Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions (SCAI)**

800-992-7224 • [www.scai.org](http://www.scai.org)

## **Today's Caregiver**

[www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com)

## **WomenHeart**

[www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)