Basic Sternal Precautions

It’s important to keep moving while protecting your child’s sternum (breastbone) so it heals. The sternum (breastbone) usually takes six to eight weeks to heal.

Discuss your child’s specific limitations and “sternal precautions” with your child’s surgeon.

Date of heart surgery: __________  Sternal precautions through: __________

- Do NOT put direct pressure on sternum (breastbone).
- Do NOT lift, push or pull anything that weighs more than 10 pounds (a gallon of milk weighs almost nine lbs.).
- Do NOT bear any weight on your arms. This means do not push up and out of your bed/chair with your arms.
- Do NOT raise arms over head one at a time.
- Do NOT raise your elbow higher than your shoulder, unless you use both arms together and raise them only in front of your face.
- Do NOT reach arms behind your back.
- STOP activities that cause chest pain, shortness of breath, racing/pounding heart, dizziness, or extreme fatigue and contact physician.

Activities of Daily Living After Heart Surgery

Getting Out Of Bed

1. For the first 48 hours and when experiencing severe pain, hug a pillow or cross your arms over chest.
2. Bend your knees and roll onto your side.
3. Move your feet off the bed and begin to place them on the floor. Gently use the side of your arm to raise your body to sit up.
4. Sit on the side of the bed before you stand.

1  2  3  4
Getting Into Bed
1. Hug a pillow or cross your arms over your chest. Stand near the top of the bed. With the back of your legs touching the edge of the bed, slightly lean forward and slowly sit down.
2. In one smooth motion, lie on your side and lift your legs up onto the bed. Keep your knees bent.
3. Use your legs to help you roll onto your back. Use your feet to scoot up/down in bed, do not use your arms.

Standing Up From Bed, Chair Or Toilet
1. Hug a pillow or cross your arms over your chest.
2. Lean forward with nose over toes. Use your legs to stand. Do not push with your arms.

Putting On Shirts Over Your Head
1. Lay the front of the shirt facing down in your lap with neck collar at your knees.
2. Slide your arms into the sleeves, starting from the bottom of the shirt.
3. Gather up the shirt in your hands. Tuck your chin toward your chest. With both elbows raised in front of your face, place the shirt over your head.
4. Adjust the shirt from the shoulders. Reach across your belly or from the side as needed. Remember, do not move arms behind your back.
Taking Off Shirts Over Your Head
1. Tuck your chin toward your chest.
2. Then, reach to the back of your collar with both hands and pull the shirt over your head.
3. When you remove the sleeves, keep your arms and elbows in front of your body.

1. After using the toilet, clean by reaching through your legs from the front of your body and wipe front to back. **Do not** reach behind your back.
2. If you have difficulty with this task, ask your occupational therapist for an assistive device such as a toilet aid.

Remember, when taking off and putting on your shirt, do **NOT** raise your arms over your head.

Personal Hygiene

Bathing
*After doctor has cleared you for bathing:*

- **Do not spray water directly on the incision site or submerge in bathtub until cleared by the surgeon.**

1. Wash under your arms and the side of your body by lifting your arm only to shoulder height and reaching across the front of your body.
2. Wash between your legs by reaching front to back.
3. Wash and dry your hair by reaching both hands to your head at the same time while keeping your elbows in front of your face.

Remember, **do not** reach your arm above your head or behind your back.
Hair Care

1. To comb or style, raise your arm only to shoulder level or use both arms while keeping your elbows in front of your face.

Precautions for School-Age Children & Teens

- Avoid pushing up onto furniture when standing up.
- Avoid being pulled up by the arms.
- Do not carry heavy bags, backpacks or pull roller bags.
- Do not carry heavy books at school. Consider asking teachers to provide extra sets of books to keep at home.
- Do not play contact sports, lift weights or participate in physical education class until cleared by your doctor.
- Avoid activities that increase the chance of falling or injuring the chest (like bike riding, skateboarding, rollerblading, or ball play)
- Use a small pillow to support your chest when coughing or sneezing, leaning forward, or getting up from lying in bed.

If you have any questions, please contact your occupational therapist and/or physical therapist.