

## Heart Bypass Surgery

### Definition:

The arteries that supply your heart with oxygen, blood flow and nutrients are called your coronary arteries. Over time your coronary arteries can become clogged with fat and cholesterol that reduce the blood flow to your heart. If it becomes totally blocked it can cause a heart attack. In heart bypass surgery your heart surgeon creates a detour or bypass around the blocked part of your coronary artery restoring blood flow to your heart.

### Health Conditions that should be considered prior to surgery:

- People over 70 are at higher risk for complications.
- Women are at higher risk than men.
- Previous heart surgery.
- Having other serious medical conditions (such as diabetes, lung disease, kidney disease or peripheral vascular disease)

### Risks involved in Heart Bypass Surgery:

Most patients (95%-98%) who undergo heart bypass surgery have no complications. Although there are risks with this surgery such as heart attack, stroke, blood clots, sternal wound infection and even death in a small percentage (1-2%).

### The surgery:

Heart Surgery is the most frequently performed surgery in the United States. It has been performed for more than thirty years and it is important to remember that your heart surgeon has had extensive training in bypass techniques.

The surgery will be performed in a hospital operating room. The entire surgery takes from 4-6 hours. You will be put to sleep by an anesthesiologist. Your heart surgeon will make an incision in the middle of your chest and separate your breast bone. This allows him to see your heart. He will then use a vein from your leg or chest for a graft. This graft is what he uses to bypass your clogged artery restoring blood flow to your heart. Following the surgery your breastbone will be rejoined with wire and your incision closed.

In the traditional surgery you may be connected to the heart-lung machine. This machine adds oxygen to your blood and other parts of your body. This is necessary because your heart will be stopped before the graft is done. Another technique which is being used more frequently allows you to avoid the heart-lung machine. This technique called the off-pump coronary bypass, allows your heart surgeon to place the graft while your heart is still beating.

Another alternative allows your heart surgeon to use smaller incisions without splitting the breast bone. This type of surgery is referred to as Minimally Invasive Direct Coronary Artery Bypass or MIDCAB.

### After Surgery:

After the surgery you will spend 5-7 days in the hospital. Immediately following the surgery you will be taken to the ICU or intensive care unit so you can be monitored closely. There will be several tubes attached to your body. When you wake up you may have a tube in your mouth for several hours to help you breathe. Two or three tubes will be attached to your chest to help fluid drain from around your heart. These are removed 1 to 3 days after surgery. You may also have a catheter in your bladder that will drain urine until you can go to the bathroom on your own. You will also have an IV line for fluids and medication.

When constant monitoring is no longer needed you will be transferred to a step down or transitional unit where your rehabilitation will begin.

After your heart surgery it takes 4-6 weeks to start feeling better. During recovery it is normal to:

- Have a poor appetite. This will take several weeks to return.
- If the graft for your heart was taken from your leg you may have swelling. Elevating your leg and wearing a special elastic hose called TED hose will help with this problem
- Having difficulty sleeping at night which will improve with time.
- Having constipation.
- Having mood swings or feeling depressed. This should get better but if it doesn't be sure to talk with your doctor.
- Having difficulty with short term memory. This will get better.

When you go home and return to your regular activities will be determined by your doctor.

The benefits of heart surgery may not be noticed for about 3-6 months. In the majority cases the grafts should remain open and function for 10-15 years. Heart Surgery improves blood flow to your heart but does not prevent reoccurrence of coronary blockage. You need to avoid smoking, watch your diet, get regular exercise and keep your blood pressure at healthy level. Talk with your doctor if you have questions or concerns.

### **Contact Information**

901.818.0300

Memphis Heart Clinic