

# You survived a heart attack. Here's how cardiac rehab can help

September 21 2023, by Cara Murez

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Cardiac rehabilitation is a key part of recovery from a heart attack,

helping to prevent another, perhaps more severe one.

About 800,000 people in the United States have a heart attack every year, about one-quarter of whom have already had a heart attack, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But research has found that participating in [cardiac rehabilitation](#) decreases the chance you will die in the five years following a heart attack or bypass surgery by about 35%.

## How does it work?

Cardiac rehab works by strengthening the heart and body after a heart attack. It can relieve symptoms of heart problems, such as chest pain.

These programs are often done in a hospital or [rehabilitation center](#). Some programs can be done at home. Rehab may start while you are still in the hospital or right after discharge.

A [rehabilitation program](#) usually lasts about three months but can range anywhere from two to eight months, the CDC noted in a news release.

Many insurance plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, cover it with a doctor's referral. Your doctor can tell you more.

Supervised cardiac rehabilitation includes [physical activity](#) and education about healthy eating, how to take medication as prescribed and how to quit smoking. It also includes counseling to find ways to relieve stress and improve mental health.

This may be done by a team of people, including health care workers, exercise and nutrition specialists, physical therapists and counselors.

Anyone who has had a heart problem, such as a [heart attack](#), heart failure or heart surgery, can benefit from cardiac rehab. But not everyone starts and some drop out early. These include women, especially minority women. This could be because doctors may be less likely to suggest cardiac rehabilitation to women, the CDC noted.

Older adults are also less likely to try cardiac rehab, possibly because they fear the exercise component will be too difficult. Yet the regimen may be even more useful for seniors because it can improve strength and mobility to make daily tasks easier.

Participating in [cardiac rehab](#) can help reduce stress, improve mood and lessen or prevent depression symptoms. It can increase energy and strength to make daily activities like carrying groceries and climbing stairs easier. It can also help a person stay on track with prescribed medications.

**More information:** The American Heart Association outlines the [warning signs](#) of a heart attack.

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