

Recovery Workout

by

Alan Palmieri

“Still Here” is an article written about my July 29, 2003 heart attack and the five bypass emergency surgery I underwent. Several sources asked me to write an article about the rehab and exercise routine I followed after my ordeal... this is one of the articles. I titled it, “Recovery Workout”.

Since writing “Still Here,” the article about the massive heart attack and emergency surgery I had, many people have written asking about my recuperation and therapy. What did I do? What did my therapy and exercise routines consist of? To be honest, a year and a half later I do not feel as good as I did before undergoing the nightmare. Some people have told me they felt great after they had their heart surgery. Maybe that’s because they were not feeling very well before they had the surgery or perhaps they didn’t endure the same thing I did. I don’t know I’m not a doctor. All I know is what I know. I don’t know what took the most out of me, having a massive heart attack or the emergency surgery and five bypasses.

Getting back on track, the therapy and exercises I did after my surgery is what I am supposed to be talking about. I hope this is not going to be one of those articles in which I just drift from one point to another. My wife will try to proof my work and she yells at me all the time, “I wish you would stick to the point and quit rambling.” Ah, my taskmaster! Back on track!! First of all, I didn’t do anything for a full year after my experience and operation. I was not able to. Not only was I instructed to rest for an extended time before I began my therapy, I came down with pneumonia, two different infections, bouts of irregular heart beats, serious reactions to the medications I was

prescribed, and several other things that made it impossible to perform even the mildest of activity. Putting it bluntly it was pure torture!

Once I had regained a foothold on myself the doctor prescribed cardiac rehab. That's when I discovered my insurance would not cover the financial part sufficiently enough to allow me to take it. I talked to the nurse, who knew a little about me, and she said; "From what I've seen and know about you, you most likely know more than enough to do your own rehab." Needless to say I thought that was pretty nice, stroking my ego is what it was, still it was nice to hear.

Thus I set out to rebuild myself and I had to start from scratch, I mean the bottom. Mentally, physically, and emotionally I was a total and complete wreck. Not a part of the exercise aspect I am supposed to be talking about, I have to say the impact the heart attack and surgery had on me mentally and emotionally was something I would never have thought possible. It was traumatic to say the least. I believe the mental and emotional state I had to endure was maybe even worse than the physical.

Before I began exercising, I took a lot of time to evaluate my entire situation. The medication I was on, the food changes in my diet, the long absence from exercise, the need to watch the amount of stress I placed on my heart, etc. I did not allow one single aspect go without an honest evaluation. I was out of shape and that was a fact. I lost size and all definition and shape. My strength was completely gone and my coordination and endurance were, well... "What is coordination and endurance," gone. At my age and from what I had gone through a slow but steady program needed to be developed.

Prior to my problems, I trained using a great many techniques, programs, and routines. Quite often my training was extremely heavy and always intense, other times light and more causal. I do not believe in any one single routine or program as being the "absolute best" for everyone. I believe in variety, a great amount of it, in my training. Now, after all my health problems, I had come to the point I would have to completely

alter what I had done in the past. Now simply walking for a hundred yards was a major task and walking is the first thing I did for my come back.

I began walking inside the house, down the hall, two times. As I could I upped it to four times, then six. Next I began walking up and down the stairs. Each day I tried to do more than the day before. I graduated to walking outside up and down my driveway. Soon I began to increase the pace. I continued to walk longer and faster. All the while I was also performing mostly freehand exercise movements and stretching. Naturally the exercises were not strenuous and I didn't perform many reps. I did squats, lunges, calf raises, and dumbbell curls with 15 lbs. Boy that was hard to swallow. Before my "happening" I was doing dumbbell curls with 65 lbs. for sets and reps. No more! Those days are gone.

What I'm trying to say is this; I started back doing things I could do and continued to add to them each and every day. The important thing for me was in the doing. It was a slow process. As I could I advanced to my first workout. This is what that workout consisted of. I walked daily and did the following routine three times per week.

Walk one mile in 18 minutes

Bench Press 1 x 25 with 35 lbs

Lunges No Weight 1 x 15 with 0 lbs

Dumbbell Curls 1 x 12 with 15lbs

Close Grip Triceps Press 1 x 12 with 65 lbs

Not much I know, but remember, it took a long time for me to get to the point I could do this simple workout. I progressed, as my body would allow which was rather slowly. I could no longer push myself to the point I once did but I pushed until both mind and body told me "enough." Once conditioned and after a good amount of time, I was able to increase everything I did. Listed is my actual workout. Column 1 was followed for the first month. Column 2 was followed for the second month and, Column 3 was

followed in the third month after I returned to somewhat more normal training. Today I adjust my workouts constantly and train more instinctively than ever before.

Monday and Thursday:

Walk 1 mile in 12 minutes

Run 1 mile non stop (slow and not pretty to watch but I got it done)

Walk 1 mile, fast paced. No time watched.

Monday:	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Incline Dumbbell Press	2 x 10	3 x 10	5 x 10
Incline Dumbbell Flyes	2 x 10	3 X 10	4 x 10
Triceps Extensions	2 x 8	3 x 8	4 x 8
Triceps Press Downs	2 x 10	3 x 10	4 x 10

Tuesday:

Bent Over Row	2 x 12	3 x 10	5 x 10
Lat Pulldown	2 x 10	3 x 10	4 x 10
Dumbbell Shrug	2 x 10	3 x 10	4 x 10
Barbell Body Drag Curl	2 x 10	3 x 8	4 x 8
Incline Dumbbell Curl	2 x 10	3 x 6	4 x 6

Wednesday:

Lunges	2 x 15	3 x 25	4 x 25
Sissy Squats	2 x 10	3 x 10	4 x 10
Leg Extensions	2 x 12	3 x 12	4 x 10
Leg Curl	2 x 10	3 x 10	4 x 10
Calf Raises	2 x 15	3 x 12	5 x 12

Thursday:

Dumbbell Press	2 x 15	3 x 12	4 x 12
Side Lateral Raises	2 x 12	3 x 10	3 x 10

Bent Over Laterals	2 x 10	3 x 10	3 x 10
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Friday:

Barbell Bench Press	2 x 20	3 x 25	3 x 25
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Bent Over Row	2 x 15	3 x 20	3 x 20
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Close Grip Triceps Press	2 x 10	3 x 15	3 x 15
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Dumbbell Curl	2 x 10	3 x 15	3 x 15
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Leg Extensions	2 x 12	3 x 25	3 x 25
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Seated Calf Raises	2 x 15	3 x 15	3 x 15
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Saturday and Sunday:

Rest

What you may notice from my workouts is the absence of any abdominal work. When I had my heart attack the pain was not actually in my chest area, rather it was in the solar plexus region. Every time I have tried to perform crunches or other movements for the abs it actually results in discomfort and has brought on an irregular heartbeat. Why I don't know and even my doctors have been unable to explain it. The closest explanation has been that I may have some type of nerve damage from the surgery and these exercises aggravate the situation. Not sure but this sounds logical, in any event, it's there.

Years ago if you had a major surgery, the doctors wanted complete bed rest and time for recuperation to take place. Today, the faster you can get up and going the better. I believe in that philosophy myself and honestly feel recovery time can be dramatically cut if the patient can and is able to get moving as soon as possible after surgery. I would however, make certain to follow the advice of the doctors.

What I did and how I did it was an individual thing. Everyone is different so everyone would need to follow what works best for their own set of circumstances. I definitely would not begin an exercise routine after major surgery without first consulting with your doctor.

Note: 2-8-05: Almost four months after I wrote this article I am progressing well with my training. I have regained a good amount of my strength but no where close to what I had prior to my heart attack. That bothered me a great deal at first but with time I figured, at my age why do I need it, I don't. I train according to how I feel and really use instinctive training each workout. During one of my first workouts I did a silly thing and attempted to do dumbbell bench presses with a pair of 90 pound dumbbells... mistake and silly are not the words for it. Foolish and dumb are! I had warmed up really well and did four reps but man did I pay for it. At one point I did use well over hundred pound dumbbells for sets of 10 reps; those days are gone for me. I leaned a lesson anyone with even the smallest amount of intelligence would know – you don't do things like that.



Dumbbell bench press with a pair of 90 pound dumbbells...

Today if I go heavy it's really light compared to the Alan of old but that's okay. I don't train for size or definition I train to be training. I do a lot more experimenting with exercise movements and combinations. Something I always did but over the last couple of years abandoned for reasons unknown.

I continue to have some real battles with depression and anxiety. Some people are lucky and don't have that problem, I have not been as fortunate. It does seem to be getting better... time will tell. I seem to look back as much as I do forward. I thank God for making it through. The depression part is really the biggest hurdle for me. I recognize and know I slip in and out with bouts of it. Just need to keep fighting!

This article is a complement to “Still Here” and “Supplement And Prescription Medication Pro and Con”, articles I wrote about my heart attack, surgery, supplements and medication. Everything in these articles represents my experiences and personal opinions. I’m not a doctor and don’t claim to be so the contents are not meant to provide any medical advice or guidance. They are an attempt to share my experiences.

...God speed to all with health problems!

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