

## What's next?

Despite all of these challenges, SCA survivors often return to normal life not long after the event. Sometimes, survivors find that more formal counseling is necessary. If the emotional and mental challenges following your SCA persist or interfere with your life, talk to a professional.

Some survivors have found joining a survivor support group helps them adjust, both emotionally and physically, to their new lives. Meeting other people who've been through a similar experience will help with fears and anxiety and provide a forum for you to get answers from someone who's already been through this.



Go to [LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) to get more information on the value a survivor support group can provide, and if there isn't

an active group in your area, use the resources at [LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) to start one. You can use your experiences and knowledge to help others travel the road you are currently on. And enjoy your second chance at life.

## Life After SCA

Presented by the HeartRescue Project

[LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) provides resources to help survivors of sudden cardiac arrest and their families. **Because every SCA survivor who gets a second chance at life also deserves a second shot at living.**

# Life After SCA

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## Helping sudden cardiac arrest survivors get back to living

Surviving sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is just the first step toward full recovery—but don't worry, there are plenty of resources to assist you as you recover. Many survivors have described physical, mental, and emotional changes after the event—some that last for a few hours, and others that never go away. While each person's experience is unique, many have said they share similar feelings and go through the same lifestyle changes, from receiving an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) to new thoughts about their own mortality.

As you and your family adjust to life after sudden cardiac arrest, remember that others have been through this before you, and there are many resources available to help you recover and return to a normal life.

## What should I expect?

Many survivors of sudden cardiac arrest experience varying levels of denial upon initially hearing that their heart stopped beating. It is perfectly normal to experience these feelings, but it's important to accept that it happened, and learn more about your cardiac arrest and what it means.

Often learning more about their experience has helped survivors accept it and recover. Talking to witnesses, EMS providers, and emergency room staff can help you understand what happened, and even why. Meeting the people who helped you survive can also be a rewarding and emotional experience for you, your family and the rescuers.



You may face challenges after your SCA. Survivors of sudden cardiac arrest face not only changes in their health and behavior, but also changes in their ways of thinking about themselves and about life. Examples of issues that others have dealt with include:

- **Medical:** Depending on factors such as your overall health and the cause and duration of your cardiac arrest, you can expect to face several more tests, procedures, and possibly a lengthy rehabilitation.
- **Physical limitations:** Slower movement due to pain is common, especially in the initial days and weeks following the SCA. Your physician may advise limiting physical activity or restricting lifting heavy weights and driving for a period of time.
- **Memory lapses:** The average time SCA survivors experience short-term memory loss is one to six weeks, though others have reported it for longer periods or indefinitely.
- **Diet:** Sodium restrictions are common, as well as lower fat and higher fiber. This is a learning process. Learn to read labels on everything, and discuss any dietary questions with your medical team.

- **Medications:** Some survivors take only a few medications, but most are on multiple medications. Having one weekly pill box for morning and one for evening makes it much easier to manage.
- **Medical devices:** Many survivors receive an ICD soon after the SCA. Become educated about your device, and make sure your family does too. Although an ICD can save your life, it's perfectly normal to have some apprehension about having one.
- **Depression or anxiety:** Even though you are thankful to be alive, your life has changed in a big way and struggling with depression or anxiety is normal. Talk to a family member or someone you trust. You may also need to speak with your doctor about counseling or medication.
- **Fear:** The biggest fear is that this might happen again. The reality is that it could. The best way to address your fear and protect your health is to become educated about SCA, the devices you may have had implanted (such as stents or an ICD), and encourage your family members and friends to learn CPR and how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED).
- **Work:** Most SCA survivors can tell you that you may be looked at differently by employers and co-workers. Some people will try and be compassionate about your situation. Others will turn and run. Don't take this personally. They probably just don't know what to say. If you feel comfortable, talk to your colleagues about what you experienced, and offer to educate them on how to respond if they are with someone who has a cardiac arrest.
- **School:** Chances are classmates will know about or may have even witnessed your SCA. If you are comfortable sharing your story, others will more than likely be interested and want to hear about it. Consider sharing and using it to educate others about the importance of CPR/AED awareness. Seek trusted teachers, coaches or friends, and don't be afraid to talk with your health office personnel.
- **Family:** This has been a big scare not only for you but for your family as well. Many survivors have had family members start CPR and call 911. Be patient with them and understand they are just looking out for you and may be scared something bad will happen again. The best solution is to talk about your feelings: good, bad and otherwise. If you weren't doing this before your SCA, now is the time to start.