

HeartMate 3 (HM3) LVAD

Physical Therapy (PT) & Occupational Therapy (OT) Clearance Checklist

Purpose: These are the functional milestones PT and OT usually require a patient to *pass* before discharge after HM3 implantation. Medical stability alone is not enough — **safe function at home** is the goal.

PT and OT are often the *silent gatekeepers* of LVAD discharge, and people are rarely told that clearly.

What PT/OT are really deciding

They are asking:

- “*Can this person move safely **with LVAD gear**?*”
- “*Can they function in **their real home**, not the hospital?*”
- “*Will this caregiver help appropriately — not too little, not too much?*”

Common surprises for patients

- You **don’t have to be strong** — you have to be **safe**
- Walking distance matters less than **balance + awareness**
- **Dizziness or near-syncope** is a bigger problem than weakness
- Managing the controller/batteries **while moving** is critical

Why PT/OT sometimes delay discharge

Even when the heart and pump are stable, PT/OT will hold discharge for:

- Orthostatic symptoms
- Fall risk
- Trouble managing LVAD equipment during daily tasks
- Ignoring sternal precautions when tired

PHYSICAL THERAPY (PT) – Mobility & Endurance

Bed Mobility & Transfers

- Independently rolls and repositions in bed using sternal precautions
- Safely moves from lying → sitting → standing
- No dizziness, syncope, or LVAD alarms with position changes

Walking / Ambulation

- Ambulates safely with LVAD equipment (controller, batteries)
- Walks required distance for discharge (often **150–300+ feet**, center-specific)
- Maintains balance while managing LVAD gear
- Stops appropriately if fatigued or symptomatic

Stairs (If Required at Home)

- Ascends and descends stairs safely
- Manages LVAD equipment while on stairs
- Uses handrails appropriately
- No unsafe shortness of breath or instability

Endurance & Safety

- Tolerates multiple short walks per day
 - Vital signs stable during and after activity
 - Understands pacing — no “pushing through” symptoms
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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT) – Daily Living & Safety

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

- Independently performs grooming, toileting, and dressing
- Uses adaptive techniques if needed
- Maintains sternal precautions during ADLs

LVAD Integration into Daily Life

- Safely manages LVAD during dressing and undressing
- Protects driveline during bathing (no immersion)
- Positions controller and batteries securely during activity

Fine Motor & Cognitive Skills

- Manipulates small items (batteries, connectors) reliably
 - Follows multi-step instructions
 - Demonstrates good judgment and safety awareness
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OT HOME SIMULATION TASKS (Very Common)

- Gets in and out of bed safely
 - Transfers on/off toilet or chair
 - Simulates shower entry/exit
 - Manages LVAD equipment during simulated home tasks
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SAFETY & AWARENESS (PT + OT Joint Focus)

- Recognizes fatigue and stops activity appropriately
 - No unsafe impulsive movements
 - No confusion or neglect of LVAD equipment during movement
 - Demonstrates fall prevention awareness
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✕COMMON PT/OT DISCHARGE BLOCKERS

- Orthostatic dizziness or syncope
 - Poor balance or high fall risk
 - Inability to manage LVAD equipment while moving
 - Ignoring sternal precautions
 - Fatigue that worsens rather than recovers with rest
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WHAT “CLEARED BY PT/OT” REALLY MEANS

It does **not** mean strong or fully recovered.

It means: - You can move **safely**

- You can protect your sternum and driveline

- You can function in your **actual home environment**

CAREGIVER ROLE IN PT/OT CLEARANCE

- Caregiver trained to assist without overhelping
 - Caregiver understands fall- prevention techniques
 - Caregiver can manage LVAD equipment during mobility if needed
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