



What can I do to help? - Before Surgery

General surgical operations cover the full spectrum of operative complexity and trauma to the body's tissues; from minor almost insignificant procedures performed under local anaesthetic, to lengthy life altering operations under general anaesthesia. Almost without exception a number of lifestyle choices will impact on an individual's preparedness for surgery and as a result the impact that has on a patient's recovery.

Using the time before surgery to address the factors listed below may be well spent if it helps avoid complications and a protracted period of recuperation.

1 - Smoking.

Any period of smoking cessation before surgery is advantageous but it is especially efficacious if this can be maintained for at least two weeks before operation. The beneficial effects are achieved by enhancing the body's abilities to clear secretions from the chest, helping with oxygenation of the tissues particularly at the site of operation and reducing the risk of blood clots.

2 - Diet.

Eating normally (a varied diet full of plenty of fruit and vegetables and rich in protein and carbohydrates) is advisable right up to undergoing operation. If weight has been lost recently or major surgery is anticipated using a "build-up diet" is advisable. Major surgery has a catabolic (destructive) effect on the body's energy reserves which are mobilised from stores to service its requirements in the early post-operative period. During this period the body does not want or need large amounts of calories (and often will not tolerate them) instead it relies on reserves stockpiled before operation. Clearly if these reserves are inadequate healing is impaired and full recovery delayed.

3 - Exercise.

Following a normal exercise regime can only be beneficial right up to the point of surgery. An exercise programme can be provided by your surgeon that may serve to condition the heart and lungs to the stress of surgery. The aim of any kind of exercise training is to raise the threshold at which the body can only continue to exert itself by beginning produce lactic acid in the muscles. This is called the aerobic threshold. Exercise that raises heart and respiration rate for defined periods (according to age and general fitness) is seen to raise the threshold. As a result blood (and therefore oxygen) can be more effectively delivered to the tissues and the body's ability to deal with operative stress improves.

4 - Medications.

Continue to take the medications you are prescribed, in the way they are prescribed. If you have concerns about them. Arrange a review with your GP. Particularly important are blood pressure medications and anticoagulants. Your surgeon should be made aware of them and they should be taken as prescribed until you are advised otherwise.

5- Symptoms.

Be aware of the symptoms that have brought you to the attention of your surgeon. If they worsen or indeed if something just doesn't seem right, let them know.

6 - Alcohol.

Unless advised otherwise alcohol in moderation can be continued up to 24-48 hours before surgery. Dehydration before any form of physical stress is rarely a good idea so alcohol during this time is best avoided. If you know you drink more alcohol than is recommended (21 units and 14 units per week for men and women respectively) you may be at risk of harm from suddenly stopping this during your surgery and recovery. Let your surgeon know, this problem can usually be dealt with easily.

6- Sleep.

Try to get a good eight hour period of continuous sleep. Don't be scared of napping throughout the day as long as this doesn't impact on sleep at night. If sleep is difficult through anxiety, ongoing symptoms or pain, let your surgeon know. Things can be done to help.

