



Preparing for Your Operation

For surgeons and operating room staff performing surgery is an everyday occurrence but for you it will be a major life event. Surgery and anesthesia have risks and your surgeon will explain them to you. The surgical team caring for you will be working hard to reduce the chances of any harm coming to you. It is difficult to eliminate all risks associated with surgery but the level of risk can often be reduced and you can be confident that your team will do their part. However, you too can reduce the chances of harm during and after your operation by preparing yourself as outlined below.

1. Weight Loss

During the consultation with your surgeon your height and weight will be recorded and used to calculate your BMI or body mass index. Using the BMI chart your surgeon can tell you what your weight should be for your height. Being overweight increases the risks of surgery. The surgery is more difficult to perform, may require a larger incision, and is more likely to be complicated by bleeding, infection, deep vein thrombosis in the legs, and possibly chest infection.

If your BMI is too high you should take steps necessary to lose weight before surgery. Weight loss should never be done quickly and if your surgery is urgent, for example cancer surgery, you may not have time. If your surgery can be delayed for a few months then you should try and lower your BMI through diet and exercise. If you do not know how to lose weight you should consider seeking help from experts such as Weight Watchers. There is also a wealth of information on the internet. One such credible source is <http://www.healthmacs.com>.

2. Health and Wellness Considerations

Smoking: Smoking increases the risks for surgery, particularly if you require a general anesthetic. Smokers have more mucus or phlegm and have more difficulty clearing their lungs after surgery. This increases the risk for pneumonia.

Smokers also are at higher risk of infection in their wound because of a shortage of oxygen to the tissues. Smoking interferes with the formation of healing tissue. People who have hernia repairs and smoke have a higher risk of failure of the operation.

If you cannot stop smoking you should consult your family doctor for help. Remember some people gain weight when they stop smoking and that would also be bad for you!

Exercise: Regular exercise makes you feel good by relieving stress and increasing breathing and circulation. It strengthens your heart and lungs and helps you tone your muscles and lose weight. It is a good idea to include exercise in your weight loss program or as part of your effort to stop smoking. Walking for 30 minutes twice daily is a good, safe exercise.

Recreational drugs: Marijuana has the same effect on your lungs and tissue oxygen as cigarettes and should be stopped prior to surgery. Cocaine increases your risk for heart attack during and after surgery. It is best to stop all recreational drugs at least one month prior to surgery. If you are using drugs it is important to tell the members of your surgical team.

Alcohol: Alcohol can contribute to obesity and can cause fatty swelling of the liver making some operations more difficult (eg gallbladder removal). Chronic alcohol abuse can cause delirium tremens or 'DT's' after surgery when you will not be able to drink.

People with DT's can become confused and violent and this can interfere with your recovery and cause further complications. You should consult your family doctor for advice about cutting back on alcohol consumption prior to surgery.

3. Getting Ready for the Procedure

Shaving: You should not shave the area where you will be having surgery. This increases the risk of an infection in your wound. If you need shaving for surgery it will be done in the operating room after you are asleep or sedated.

If you have diabetes: Poor control of blood sugar increases the risk of infection complicating your surgery. You should consult your family doctor or endocrinologist to make sure your diabetes is well controlled. The HbA1c is a good indicator of long term control and you should have this checked. If you are overweight then dieting and exercise can improve your blood sugar control, but remember to consult the physician looking after your diabetes first.

Vitamins and herbal supplements: Many of these products increase the risk of bleeding during surgery and should be stopped at least 2 weeks prior to surgery. A simple multivitamin does not pose a problem.