

Preparing for major surgery during the Coronavirus outbreak



Information for patients Pre-Operative Assessment

In order to help you fully prepare for surgery, we would normally ask you to come to a group patient education session where we teach you how to get ready for your operation. This is how we usually provide information to patients to help you prepare for major surgery. However, due to restrictions relating to the Coronavirus outbreak we are required to cancel these face to face sessions.

To ensure you are as well prepared for surgery as possible during this difficult time, we are instead recommending that you carefully read and follow the advice below.

Why do I need to prepare for surgery?

Major surgery places the body under a great deal of stress. Like a marathon, if you do not prepare, you will not do as well as you could. During your recovery from major surgery;

- your heart, lungs and kidneys will have to work harder than usual
- it may be painful to breathe deeply or cough due to the surgery
- it may be a while before you can eat and drink normally again
- you may feel very weak and tired due to your body breaking down muscle after the operation

However, by being fitter and healthier before surgery, you can improve your recovery and also:

- reduce your risk of infections
- reduce the risk of heart or chest problems
- reduce the length of time you stay in hospital
- improve your chances of returning to your previous health and quality of life

The good news is, there are many things you can do to improve your recovery!

The rest of this leaflet takes you through a series of areas to help you prepare, so that you can be as fit as possible beforehand.



How can I prepare for surgery?

We recommend starting with this video from the Royal College of Anaesthetists. It shows you the journey you are about to go on and covers some simple steps you can take to help you prepare.

- **Video: Fitter, better, sooner**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONMHMX-nFgY&feature=youtu.be

Eat a healthy, balanced, high protein diet

Good nutrition is essential before and after surgery. Try starting to eat more healthily by:

- Eating at least 5 portions of **fruit and vegetables** per day
- Having **fish** twice a week as a good source of omega-3
- Aiming for a **high protein diet**. Protein is important for building up muscle strength before the operation and for maintaining it afterwards. Protein is vital for healing.
 - Examples include eggs, lean meat (chicken and turkey have less fat), cheese, fish, nuts, beans, lentils, spinach, yoghurts, milk, broccoli and avocado.
- Taking **Vitamin D** supplements (800-1000 units/day). Vitamin D is essential in helping to maintain strong bones, muscle and your immune system. Supplements are recommended for everybody, especially during the winter months and particularly for older people who are less able to make vitamin D.
- Choosing **unsaturated oils and spreads**. If eaten in small amounts they can help reduce cholesterol
- **Reducing sugar, salt and fat**. Try to avoid, or at least cut down on these types of food.

For more information and tips on diet see:

- **The NHS eat-well guide**
www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

Advice if you have a small appetite

If you are struggling to eat, losing weight or having surgery on your oesophagus or stomach we advise that you:

- **Weigh yourself** every week so any weight loss is noticeable. If you lose a lot of weight, you will lose muscle mass too, which is vital for your recovery. If you begin to lose weight, contact your specialist nurse or surgical team for advice and support.
- If your appetite is poor, **eat little and often**, aim to have 5-6 small meals a day. You may find soft or semi-liquid foods such as yoghurt, ice cream or protein shakes are easier to digest.
- Choose **high protein, high calorie** foods such as full fat milk and yoghurt, cream, butter, grated cheese, cottage cheese, cream cheese and well cooked eggs.
- Aim to have **1 pint of full fat milk** a day, either as a drink or on cereals or in puddings.

For more information read:

- **Eating well with a small appetite**
<https://publicdocuments.sth.nhs.uk/PIL1852.pdf>

Improving fitness

Research demonstrates that being fitter reduces complications after surgery. It can:

- Help to strengthen and build muscle
- Help to reduce stress
- Improve joint movement and keep bones strong
- Aid bowel movement
- Help to improve your confidence

Whilst Coronavirus has resulted in restrictions to outside activity, there is still a lot that you can do in your own home to improve your fitness. You could try walking up and down the stairs or the garden, or strengthening exercises such as squats or step-ups.

Aim to do 20-30 minutes of exercise a day. During exercise you should feel slightly out of breath but still able to hold a conversation.

You can still go for a walk outside, provided you are alone or with those you live with. Remember to keep your distance from other people by remaining 2 metres or an arm-span away.

There are plenty of examples on the internet of exercise you can do at home. Why not try these:

- **Macmillan warm up standing or seated exercises**
https://youtu.be/Oo_mbNBDCI8
- **British Heart Foundation 10 minute workout**
www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/10-minute-workout

Starting gently

If you are unable to manage walking or standing exercises, start with chair exercises. This could include leg raises or arm exercises whilst sitting. Once you've built up enough strength, aim to move on to walking or stepping exercises instead.

- **British Heart Foundation chair based exercises**
www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/chair-based-exercises

Exercise advice:

- Some discomfort is ok, but do not 'push' so hard that it causes pain.
- You do not have to do all exercises in one go, but it is important that you exercise regularly throughout the day.
- Stop when you feel you have done enough.
- After exercises are complete, any increase in discomfort should settle down again (back to previous level within 15 minutes). If not then you are pushing too hard.
- Do a few repetitions of each exercise to start.
- Build up the number of repetitions gradually, once confident you are not experiencing too much discomfort.
- Remember you may not be able to do as much as the day before.

You should stop exercising and rest if you experience any of the following:

- Severe chest pain or increased chest tightness
- Dizziness or feeling faint
- Much more breathless than normal following exertion
- Joint or muscle pain

For more information about what to expect after your operation we recommend the following leaflet. Although it refers specifically to colorectal surgery, it provides good advice for all patients having abdominal surgery. The deep breathing and strength exercises are particularly recommended before as well as after your surgery:

- **Rehabilitation after colorectal surgery**
<https://publicdocuments.sth.nhs.uk/pil3781.pdf>

Reduce smoking

Smoking greatly increases the risk of lung complications after surgery such as pneumonia. Smokers are 2-3 times more likely to suffer a chest infection than non-smokers which can lead to a much longer stay in hospital. Smoking damages the lining of your lungs, so secretions are not cleared effectively, especially after an operation.

Smokers breathe in carbon monoxide, which is carried around the body instead of oxygen. As a result, less oxygen is delivered to the body, which slows down recovery. Stopping smoking is the best thing you can do to improve your recovery. Simply cutting down the number of cigarettes you smoke does not bring any of these benefits. **You need to stop completely.**

You are 4 times more likely to stop smoking if you seek help to do so. The Yorkshire Smoke Free service can be contacted on **0800 6120 0111** or **0330 660 1116**. They are offering telephone advice and support during the Coronavirus outbreak.

For further information see:

- **Yorkshire Smoke Free**
www.yorkshiresmokefree.nhs.uk
- **Stop before your op!**
<https://publicdocuments.sth.nhs.uk/pil1293.pdf>

Reduce your alcohol intake

Drinking more than 14 units per week (1 unit = 1 small glass of wine or ½ a pint of beer) for both men and women increases your risk of complications. This is because excessive alcohol intake damages your liver. Your liver plays an essential role in helping you fight off infections and also produces new proteins needed for wound healing. Consider cutting down or not drinking any alcohol in the lead up to your operation to enable your liver to work as well as possible.

Mental health & well-being

Major surgery can be daunting for most people. Anxiety and depression are very common both before and after your surgery. Recovering from major surgery doesn't always go smoothly – there can be ups and downs along the way, both in your physical and mental health. Stress can lead to poor sleep and tiredness which in turn reduces physical activity and can contribute to a low mood and feelings of depression. Sometimes these feelings can become severe enough for help to be needed.

Don't be afraid to ask for help from:

- **Close family and friends.** Talk to them over the phone and tell them how you are feeling, including any worries or anxieties about the surgery. Talking things through can sometimes give you a better perspective on your concerns and the situation you are facing.
- **Sheffield IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapy)** is a phone and online resource that you can use to help tackle any feelings of anxiety, depression or stress. They can be contacted on **0114 226 4380** or via their website: <http://iaptsheffield.shsc.nhs.uk/about-us/>
- **Weston Park Cancer Support Centre** provides a wide range of services for all cancer patients and their carers. You do not have to be a patient at Weston Park Hospital to use the service. They offer financial advice, patient information and psychological support. During the Coronavirus outbreak, the centre is closed but they are still offering telephone advice and support. You can contact them on **0114 553 3330** or by email: cancersupport@wpcancercharity.org.uk or via their website www.westonpark.org.uk/cancer-support/support-services/

What will happen after my surgery?

After your surgery, you may be taken to the High Dependency Unit (HDU). We recommend watching this video about HDU. Patients and relatives who have attended our surgery school in the past have found it particularly useful:

- **Critical Care at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals**
<https://youtu.be/hFE4CYGiyA>

Important aspects of your recovery on HDU will include:

- Regular deep-breathing and coughing exercises.
- Getting you up and on your feet as soon as possible to build up your strength. This will help to speed up your recovery.
- Ensuring that your pain is adequately controlled using a combination of either epidural infusion and/or intravenous pain relief such as morphine. It is essential that you can cough and deep-breathe. If it is too painful to do this, you must tell the nurse looking after you. Do not suffer in silence! For more information on pain relief please see the Royal College of Anaesthetists website (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patient-information/patient-information-resources)
- Brushing your teeth twice a day - this is important as it reduces the growth of bacteria in your mouth.
- Eating and drinking as soon as possible. For some patients, this may mean being fed by a tube into your stomach, until normal eating and drinking is possible.

Additional resources

We hope the information in this leaflet helps to get you in the best shape for your upcoming surgery. If you would like to read further information we also recommend the following websites.

- **NHS apps library**
www.nhs.uk/apps-library/filter/?categories=Healthy%20living,Mental%20health
- **NHS Live well**
www.nhs.uk/live-well/



To help support your local hospitals visit
sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk

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