



Fit for Surgery

Helping Yourself Towards a Faster Recovery

Patient Information

Fit for Surgery V1.0

Approved by NHS Lothian Patient Information Team: Jun 2022

Review date: Jun 2025

LOT 2137

Introduction

Surgery today is safer than it has ever been. The majority of patients make a full recovery and return to their previous level of health.

However, a small proportion may suffer a complication after surgery. This might include an infection, such as a chest infection, or problems with the function of the heart, lungs or kidneys. Such complications can result in a longer stay in hospital, a delayed recovery and may even cause longer-term health issues.

Importantly, there are **things you can do to reduce the risk of complications**. The staff at NHS Lothian will work together to make your operation and recovery go smoothly, but it all starts with you. We are here to support you through this process.

Surgery, and recovery afterwards, puts an extra strain on the body, particularly the heart and lungs. Being in the best health you can be will improve your chances of recovering quickly and help prevent complications.

A few small changes will make a big difference. This information booklet offers advice and support on how you can best prepare yourself physically and mentally for surgery.

Physical Activity

Having an operation and the recovery afterwards have been compared to exercise because they place a strain on the heart, lungs and muscles. Physical activity and training help prepare your body for exercise and can also help prepare your body for an operation.

Improved fitness levels allow your body to cope better with the physical stress of surgery and will reduce your chances of complications.

The benefits of improved fitness before surgery include:

- ✓ A better recovery
- ✓ Leaving hospital sooner
- ✓ Returning to a normal quality of life more quickly
- ✓ Reducing your risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes
- ✓ Improving your blood pressure control and cholesterol levels
- ✓ Helping with weight control
- ✓ Reducing anxiety and stress

What to do...

If you are normally an active person, we would encourage you to continue doing the activities that you enjoy before your operation.

If you are normally less active, it's not too late to start seeing benefits from regular exercise. You don't need to do much and every little helps.

30 Minutes



5 Days per Week



Some Ideas...

There are lots of options for becoming more active:



Brisk Walking

Swimming



Cycling

Mobility Exercises



Jogging

Exercise Classes



Football

Racket Sports



You should be exerting yourself so that your heart rate goes up and your body feels warm.

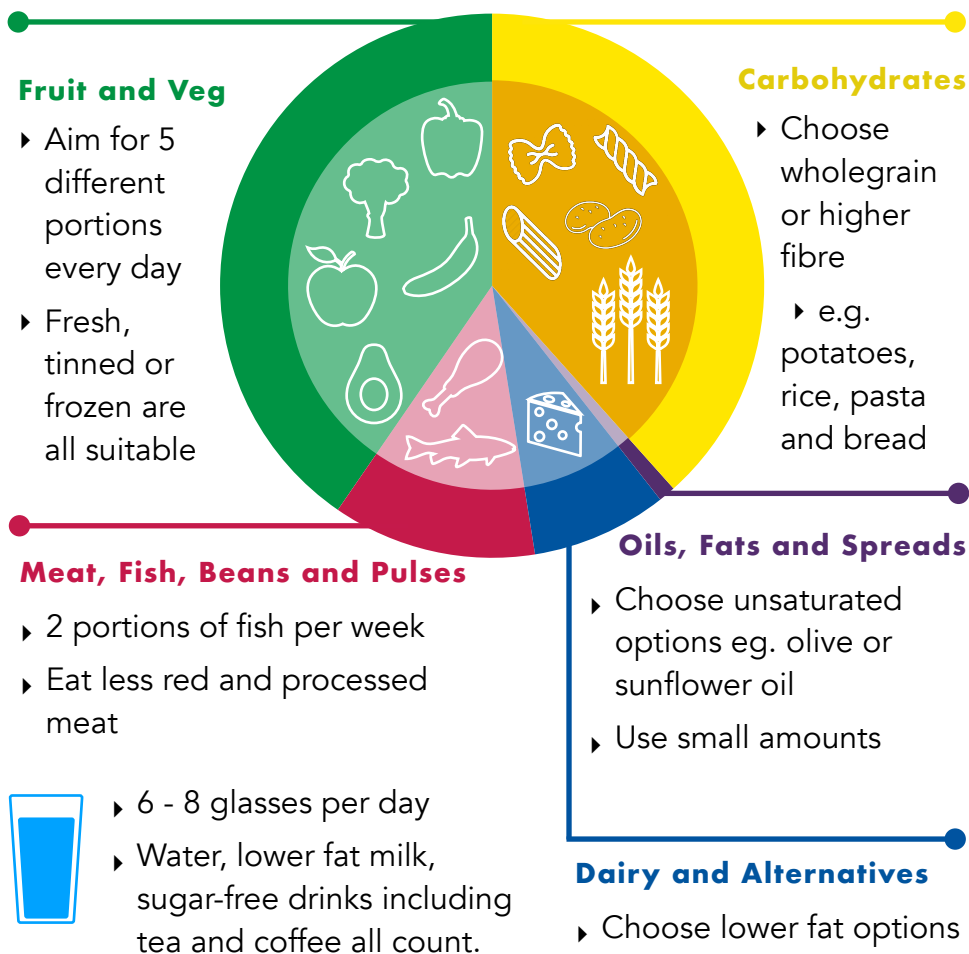
Get your friends and family involved, or join a group, to make it even more enjoyable and help you stay motivated.

It is important to increase the amount of exercise you do gradually.
If you have a heart or lung condition, or have any concerns, speak to your GP, surgeon or pre-assessment nurse before starting an exercise program.

Food

In order for your body to recover from surgery, it needs the right energy and nutrients. A healthy balanced diet is important to help prepare your body for surgery.

You should aim to eat three regular meals each day with a good balance of protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats. Try to avoid adding any extra sugar or salt to your diet.



Fuelling Your Recovery After Surgery

It is particularly important to ensure you have a good intake of fruit and vegetables, aiming to get 5 different portions per day as a minimum. These types of food are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, such as iron, folate, zinc and vitamins A, C and K. These are crucial for your recovery after surgery.

Poor Appetite and/or Weight Loss

Depending on why you're having surgery, some people may actually lose weight without trying before their operation. It is important your body has good energy stores to recover after surgery.

If you have lost weight without trying to, or have a reduced appetite, try these simple changes to stop any more weight loss:

- ▶ Eat little and often - try 5 to 6 small snacks or meals per day
- ▶ Take drinks after meals and not before
- ▶ Use full fat milk and full fat dairy products
- ▶ Add margarine or butter to mashed potatoes
- ▶ Add grated cheese and/or cream to soups and sauces

More Information...

If you want more information about what a healthy balanced diet looks like and would like some delicious meal suggestions, then you can find more information on the [NHS Eat Well](#) and [British Dietetic Association](#) websites.



Search: '[NHS Eat Well](#)'

Smoking

If you are a smoker, stopping or even cutting down before your surgery is one of the best changes you can make to improve your health.

Smoking puts an additional strain on your heart and lungs and **increases the risk of complications during and after surgery.**

Smoking increases the risk of the following problems during or after your operation:

Heart

- ▶ Reduced oxygen supply to heart and body
- ▶ Heart attack



Lungs

- ▶ Difficulty breathing during or after surgery
- ▶ Chest infection or pneumonia
- ▶ Collapsed lung



Blood Clots

- ▶ Blood clots in your veins or lungs



Bones, Skin and Wounds

- ▶ Impaired healing and scarring
- ▶ Wound infection



Immune System

- ▶ Increased risk of infection



Vaping

Vaping, or using an e-cigarette, is not as harmful as smoking cigarettes. However, we don't yet know the long-term health consequences.

Vape liquid still contains nicotine which increases your heart rate and blood pressure and puts a strain on your heart. We would also advise avoiding vaping before your operation.

What can you do...

The important thing, is that **stopping smoking before surgery reduces your risk** of these complications. The longer before your operation you can stop, the better. However, even avoiding cigarettes in the last few days can help.

An operation provides a great opportunity to improve your long-term health by stopping smoking. Perhaps it could be an **opportunity to quit smoking for good**.

Support to stop...

Quitting smoking is not easy, but we are here to support you. If stopping is something you are motivated to do, speak to your surgeon or pre-assessment nurse who can refer you to our smoking cessation service.

They offer individual and group support, as well as a range of nicotine replacement options. You can also find help and support online with **NHS Inform's Quit Your Way**.



Search: '**NHS Inform Quit Your Way**'

Medical Conditions

Medical conditions can affect your recovery from surgery. It is important to make sure any conditions you have are controlled as well as possible before your surgery.



Diabetes

Good blood sugar control is really important to reduce your risk of infections. Talk to your diabetes nurse early to see if they need to make any changes to your treatment.

Blood pressure

Blood pressure should be controlled to reduce your risk of stroke. Have your blood pressure checked at your GP surgery in good time before your operation. Your GP can then change your medication if needed.



Heart, lung and other medical problems

If you have any other long-term medical problems, consider asking your GP or nurse for a review, especially if you think your health is not as good as it could be.

Anxiety and mental health

Most people feel some anxiety about having surgery. If you are very anxious or upset, it may be helpful to talk about your concerns with your GP. Techniques including mindfulness, relaxation and breathing exercises or yoga could help you relax before and after your surgery.





Dental health

If you have loose teeth or crowns, a visit to the dentist may reduce the risk of damage to your teeth during an operation.

Alcohol

Alcohol should be enjoyed in moderation. You don't need to totally avoid alcohol before your operation, but we would advise that you stay below the recommended maximum amounts.

For both men and women this is **less than 14 units per week**, with **no more than 3-4 units on any single day**. This would be around one and a half pints of beer, or two small glasses of wine.

You should **avoid alcohol in the 24 hours before your operation**.

Are you going to get fit for surgery?

Are you going to prepare your body as best as possible and get fit for surgery? Although it may seem daunting, it is possible to make **a few small changes that will make a big difference**.

We are here to support you through this challenging time. If you have any questions about what you've just read then ask your pre-assessment nurse, surgeon or anaesthetist who will be able to guide you further.

Research

NHS Lothian is committed to supporting clinical research. If you are eligible for any research studies, someone from the research team may contact you with information. If you do not wish to take part in any research, this will not affect your clinical care in any way.

More Information

More information is available on the NHS Lothian website:



Search: **'NHS Lothian Fit for Surgery'**

The Royal College of Anaesthetists have produced a guide called **'Fitter, Better, Sooner'** which also provides excellent advice:



Search: **'RCoA Fitter Better Sooner'**

Other booklets available in this series include:

- 2 Having a General Anaesthetic**
- 3 Day of Surgery**
- 4 Getting Going After Surgery**
- 5 Pain Relief After Abdominal Surgery**
- 6 Going Home After Surgery**

There is also an information video to accompany this leaflet. You can find the video online at <https://vimeo.com/channels/1782932/videos> or by scanning the QR code.



Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you have any comments that you would like to make, please just let us know.

This publication includes text taken from the Royal College of Anaesthetists' (RCoA) leaflet *'Fitter, Better, Sooner (2018)'* but the RCoA has not reviewed this as a whole.