

Preparing for your Surgery



CAI
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College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland

Quality & Safety Advisory Committee

PREPARING FOR YOUR SURGERY

As soon as you know you might need surgery, it can help to start thinking about ways to prepare your body to improve your recovery. This can include making small changes to your lifestyle, such as staying active or looking after your general health. How much time you have to prepare will depend on how urgent your surgery is, but preparation is especially helpful for bigger operations.

You will get the best results by working together with your healthcare team in the weeks or months before your surgery. If your surgery needs to happen quickly, your doctors and nurses will still take good care of you and support you throughout your treatment.

Here are some ways which you can prepare and improve your health for your general anaesthetic:

Medical problems:

If you have a long-term medical problem, such as diabetes, asthma, bronchitis, heart problems, or high blood pressure, you should make sure you are as well as possible before your surgery. If you think you could make some improvements, you can ask your GP for a check-up. You should do this as soon as you know that you are having an operation.

Smoking and vaping:

If you smoke or vape, it's a good idea to stop before your operation. Smoking and vaping lowers the amount of oxygen in your blood and increases the risk of breathing and heart problems during and after surgery. They can also slow down wound healing and increase the chance of infection. On average, people who smoke or vape tend to stay in hospital longer than those who do not.

The time leading up to your operation is a great opportunity to stop smoking and improve your recovery. If you are unable to stop smoking completely even stopping for the 24 hours before your surgery will be beneficial.

For further information visit:

<https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/>



Weight and nutrition:

Being overweight increases many of the risks of a general anaesthetic. If you have significant excess weight, some procedures may be more difficult, including finding a vein, monitoring blood pressure, adjusting sedative doses (especially if you have obstructive sleep apnoea), inserting a breathing tube, and positioning you safely for surgery.

People living with obesity may also take longer to recover, have a higher risk of chest or wound infections, pressure injuries, are at higher risk of developing blood clots and may need a longer hospital stay.

For further information: <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/patient-information-leaflets-video-resources/anaesthesia-your-weight>

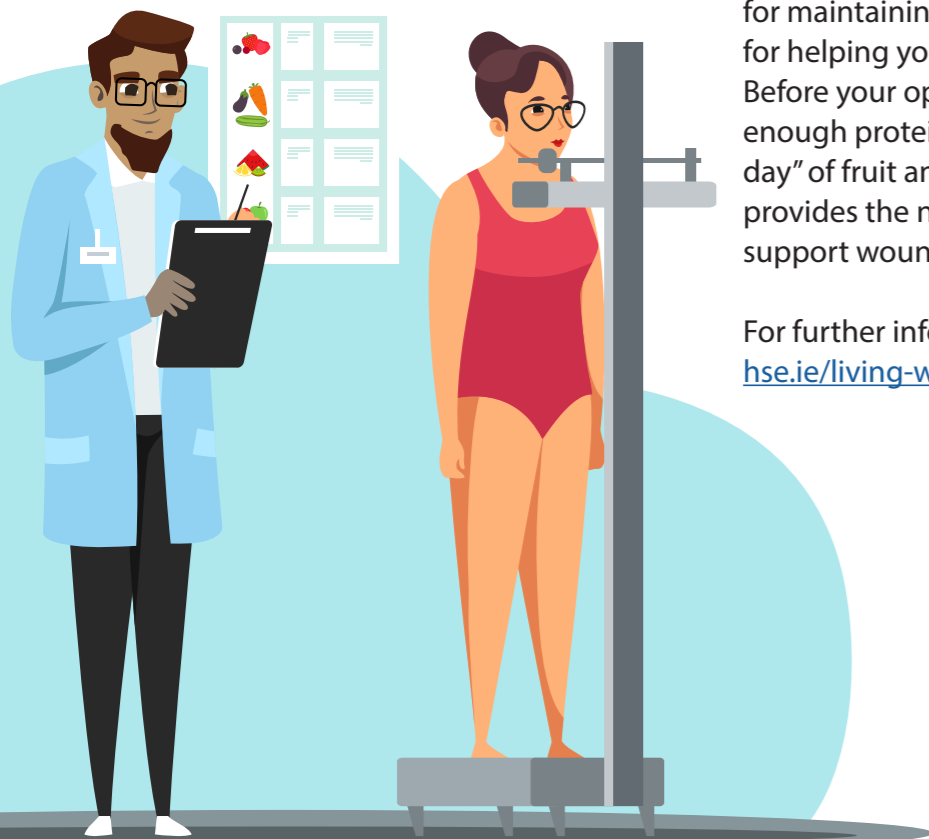
Anaesthesiologists use body mass index (BMI), along with other measurements, to determine if a patient is over or under weight. These measurements also allow the calculation of the appropriate doses of anaesthetic medicines for each patient. This ensures that care is tailored safely to your individual needs.

You can find out your BMI using the safefood BMI healthy weight calculator: <https://www.safefood.net/bmi-calculator>

Maintaining a healthy weight reduces the risks of general anaesthesia. The best way to do this are by eating a healthy diet and having regular exercise.

Eating a healthy diet is important not only for maintaining a healthy weight, but also for helping your body recover after surgery. Before your operation, focus on eating enough protein and aiming for your "5 a day" of fruit and vegetables. A balanced diet provides the nutrients your body needs to support wound healing and recovery.

For further information visit: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/healthy-eating/>



Exercise:

Adults are recommended to aim for 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. If you are not currently active, start small and build up gradually. Being more active before surgery can improve your recovery.

During and after surgery, your heart and lungs need to work harder while your body heals. If you are already active, they will be better prepared for this extra demand.

While waiting for surgery, try to increase your activity where you can. Any activity that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster counts, such as walking, cycling, dancing, or exercising at home.

Look for simple ways to move more during the day, and consider exercising with a friend or family member to stay motivated. The most important thing is to find activities you enjoy, indoors or outdoors.

For further information visit: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/exercise/>

Alcohol and use of illicit drugs:

If you drink alcohol, you should cut down or ideally stop before your surgery. If you use illicit drugs ideally you should stop before your surgery or at least avoid using them in the days before your operation.

For further information visit: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/>

For your safety, it is important to be honest with your anaesthesiologist about all drugs you are taking. This includes prescribed medicines, over-the-counter medications, and any substances obtained without a prescription.



▶ Preoperative assessment clinic

The preoperative clinic is used to assess your general health and fitness prior to your surgery. In this clinic you will discuss your anaesthetic with an anaesthesiologist or preoperative assessment nurse, where they will ask about your general health, medical history, allergies, medications, and lifestyle habits such as smoking or alcohol use. They might perform tests such as blood tests, heart tracing (ECG), blood pressure checks and check your height and weight.

You will also get instructions about fasting, medication adjustments, and how best to prepare for your surgery. This appointment helps ensure you are ready for your surgery and supports your safe recovery. It is important to bring an up-to-date list of your medications with you this appointment. This can be given to you by your pharmacist.

Depending on your health and the type of surgery you are having sometimes these clinics are carried out virtually in the form of telephone or video assessments. If your surgery needs to happen quickly the pre-operative assessment may take place on the ward.

For further information visit: <https://www.stjames.ie/operationpreparation/>



Patients for Patient Safety
Ireland





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