



How to Prepare for Lung Cancer Surgery when You Smoke

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Most doctors prefer that their patients stop smoking several weeks before surgery. This can be an especially difficult time to quit for lung cancer patients who are often under a tremendous amount of stress as a result of their diagnosis. However, knowing the benefits of smoking cessation and how to quit can help ease anxieties and optimize one's prospects of healing and recovery⁽¹⁾.

Why should you stop smoking before surgery?

Smoking damages your lungs.

This puts you at increased risk of having breathing problems after your anesthetic. The results may range from needing drugs to reduce wheezing, to being on a breathing machine in Intensive Care. Quitting smoking a few weeks prior to surgery allows your lungs to start healing and reduce this risk.

Smoking puts your heart at risk.

Cigarette smoke contains poisons that put your heart at risk, inhaling carbon monoxide, which is present in every cigarette, reduces the amount of oxygen that blood can carry to your heart and vital organs. Nicotine makes your heart beat harder and faster. Together they can put you at risk of a heart attack. Stopping smoking for even a few hours allows your body to get rid of these poisons.

Smoking after surgery makes it harder for your body to heal and increases risk of infections.

A decrease in the amount of oxygen getting to the site of your surgery makes it more difficult for the normal healing process to work. This decreases your ability to fight infection and increases the risk of wound infection. It may even reduce your chance of having a successful operation. Continuing not to smoke after surgery helps in the healing and preventing of infections.

Tips

-It may be easier to quit smoking when you are having surgery because you are away from normal routines. While you are in hospital you can get help to quit smoking from medical professionals, and the risk of withdrawal symptoms is less if you quit while in hospital. Medical staff at the hospital are there to help you quit. Also, the hospital is a non smoking area, so you will not be able to smoke while in hospital.

-If you have more than four weeks to prepare for surgery, choose a "Quit Day" at least four weeks before surgery, and stop smoking on that day.

-If you do not have four weeks, try to stop smoking at midnight before surgery, so you have at least 8 hours to get rid of the carbon monoxide in your body. Often you will be told not to eat or drink after this time, so stop smoking at the same time as you stop eating and drinking.

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Tips (continued)

Healing after surgery is improved mainly by not smoking.

The risk to your heart is reduced by even a few hours of non-smoking, but it takes your lungs several weeks to improve after you stop smoking.

Quitting smoking reduces your risk of returning to the hospital.

After six months lung function improves by 10%.
After one year the risk of a heart attack drops 50%.
After ten years the risk of getting lung cancer drops 50%. Stopping smoking is always the sensible thing to do.

-If you do not manage to stop smoking before your surgery try not to start again after the operation. You will not be allowed to smoke while in hospital. Do not hesitate to ask for help. There is less withdrawal symptoms if you stop smoking in an environment in which you have no choice.

Remember there are many resources available which offer help and advice to people who want to stop smoking. Patients can usually access this information and services through the hospital for which they are receiving care(2).

Lung Cancer Canada.

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For more information:

Visit the website at: StopSmokingForSaferSurgery.ca or phone the Smokers' Helpline Toll-free at 1-877-513-5333.

Sources:

- (1) Introduction by Lung Cancer Canada
- (2) "Stop Smoking for Safer Surgery" is an initiative originated by the department of Anesthesiology at the Scarborough Hospital and now supported across the province by Ontario's Anesthesiologists.

Disclaimer:

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