

Fit for surgery



Now that you are on the waiting list for surgery there are actions you should be taking to make sure you are as fit as possible. This will help you achieve the best outcomes from the surgery and help in your recovery.

Why is getting fit for surgery important?

It's important to have a conversation with your doctor ahead of the surgery so they can assess your risk and tell you what steps to take before the surgery.

One of the most important factors to assess is whether you have iron deficiency and/or anaemia.

- ▶ Anaemia occurs when there are not enough red blood cells in your body, or the blood cells do not have enough haemoglobin to carry oxygen to your tissues (caused by iron deficiency).
- ▶ Anaemia, if left untreated, may mean that the hospital has to delay your surgery. If surgery goes ahead and you lose blood, you may need a blood transfusion. Having a blood transfusion may make your recovery much slower.

The good news is that anaemia is easily treatable, and the sooner you find out if you are anaemic the sooner you can start treatments to help.

It is also important to find out if you are at a higher risk of bleeding during surgery, as there are several steps you can take to reduce your risk.

You may be at a higher risk of bleeding because of the medicines you are taking, your medical history or current medical conditions. The type of surgery may also carry an increased risk of bleeding.

Getting fit for surgery means assessing your risks of complications and treating any that can be treated.

Will I need any medical tests?

Your doctor will need to know if you are likely to experience a bleed during your upcoming surgery. This will involve asking you questions about your family history and whether you personally have experienced excessive bleeding in the past either before, or after, surgery.

Your doctor will probably do a blood test to determine whether you have anaemia. This will let them and you know whether you have iron deficiency, or low levels of red blood cells, and how severe it is. This will tell your doctor what the best treatment course will be.

It's important to get tested and start treatment early to ensure that there are no delays to your surgery.

Will I need to start taking any new medicines?

If it is discovered that you have anaemia, you may need to take medicines prior to your surgery.

This includes medicines to increase iron, such as iron supplements. Vitamin C increases the absorption of iron so you may need to take a combination supplement of iron and vitamin C. Multivitamins are generally not enough to treat iron-deficiency anaemia.

Ask your doctor about the benefits and side effects when using supplements.

Will I need an iron infusion?

If your iron levels are very low, your doctor may recommend an infusion of iron into your blood prior to surgery. Intravenous infusion provides a dose of iron directly into your bloodstream through a vein.

Iron infusions are used when people cannot tolerate iron supplements or when they are in need of a rapid increase in iron levels. This may be necessary if there is a short time before your surgery. Your doctor will tell you what the process is for getting an intravenous iron infusion.

Increasing your iron stores by either taking medicines or having an infusion prior to surgery reduces the risk that you will need a blood transfusion during or after the surgery. This is important because blood transfusions do come with some inherent risks.

Will I need to stop any medicines?

Your doctor will need to know if you are taking any medicines that affect your blood. You may need to change or stop some of the medicines you are taking, so bring a list of the medicines you are taking.

NPS MedicineWise provides a useful smartphone app MedicineList+ to help you keep track of your medicines. The app is available on iTunes and GooglePlay. For more information go to the NPS website www.nps.org.au

Let your doctor know if you are taking any of the following medicines:

- antiplatelet medicines like aspirin or clopidogrel (eg, Iscover, Plavix)
- anticoagulant medicines like warfarin (Coumadin/Marevan) or dabigatran (Pradaxa)
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines like ibuprofen (Nurofen) or naproxen (Inza/Naprosyn).
- proton pump inhibitors such as omeprazole (Losec)

It's also important to let your doctor know if you are taking any complementary medicines or supplements as they can affect your blood or interact with other medicines.

Other advice

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