Key Messages for Patients and the Public

Overview
Smoking can cause serious problems for people having all different types of surgery. People who quit smoking even a short time before surgery can significantly reduce the risk of complications such as breathing difficulties, infection, and impaired wound healing after surgery. The sooner someone quits smoking before surgery, the greater the chance that problems from surgery can be prevented.

The Link between Smoking and Surgical Outcomes
- Smoking causes coronary artery and heart disease that can increase the risk of problems during and after surgery. Cigarettes contain carbon monoxide and nicotine. Inhaling carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen that goes to the heart and organs, and nicotine makes the heart beat faster and harder. Patients who have nicotine and carbon monoxide in their bodies have a higher risk of heart attack, stroke, or sudden death during and after surgery.
- Smoking increases the risk of breathing problems during and after anesthesia. People who smoke have a much greater chance of needing a medical support to breathe such as a tube in the windpipe or a respirator after surgery. They are also more likely to develop lung infections after surgery than people who never smoked.
- Smoking decreases the amount of oxygen in the blood and makes it harder to heal after surgery. People who smoke have an increased risk of life-threatening infections and shock after surgery.
- People who smoke are more likely to die during or after surgery than people who never smoked.
- Research shows that stopping smoking before surgery is associated with a 41% reduction in the risk of complications from surgery. For every additional week that a person quits smoking the risks are reduced by another 19%.
- Surgery can provide an opportunity for people to stop smoking. Many patients find it easier to stop smoking when they are in the hospital, away from normal routines, in a place where smoking is not allowed, and where health care providers are available to help them quit.
Helpful Resources

- Canadian Cancer Society. *Smokers Helpline*. Free telephone, web-based or text service offering tips, tools and support to help with quitting smoking. [http://www.smokershelpline.ca/](http://www.smokershelpline.ca/)

References


