Fit for Surgery .......
Helping yourself towards a faster recovery

NHS Lothian - 2016
Introduction

Surgery today is safer than ever. The majority of patients undergoing surgery make a full recovery and return to their previous level of health. However, a small proportion of patients will suffer a complication after surgery. This may include an infection, or problems with the function of a body organ such as the heart, lungs or kidneys. Such complications can result in a prolonged hospital stay, and may even result in longer-term ill health. Patients with pre-existing medical conditions undergoing major operations are at the highest risk of complications after their surgery.

It is our aim in NHS Lothian is to ensure that your surgical journey is as smooth and safe as possible. This booklet explains how we recommend you to prepare yourself physically and mentally for your surgery and subsequent recovery.
Before your surgery 1

You could compare the recovery from surgery to doing some exercise. When you exercise, your heart and lungs need to work harder to pump blood and nutrients to your active muscles. Similarly after surgery, the heart and lungs need to work harder to pump blood and nutrients to the healing tissue, allowing the body to repair itself, regenerate and fight inflammation.

By being in the best condition that you can before your surgery, you will be in the best shape for recovery. This will help to reduce the chance of suffering a complication.
Before your surgery 2

Certain lifestyle choices are believed to be associated with an increased chance of suffering a complication after your surgery. Studies have suggested that the following behaviours (see table), may be associated with an increased risk of complications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Postoperative Risk Increase?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous drinking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of fitness</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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These behaviours are called *modifiable*. This means that you can change them in order to reduce your own risk level. We advise and encourage the following in the weeks leading up to your operation:

- Stop or cut down on smoking.
- Stop completely or halve your alcohol consumption.
- Be as active as possible, incorporating physical exercise into your daily routine. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise per day such as walking, swimming or gardening.
- Practice the post-operative exercise and breathing techniques that are illustrated in this booklet.
After your surgery

During your operation the anaesthetist will provide you with the most appropriate anaesthetic and pain-relief strategy for the type of surgery you are having. The aim is to allow you to start **breathing exercises, mobilisation** (getting up-and-about) and **eating and drinking** as soon as possible after you return to the ward.

The medical staff, nurses and physiotherapists will assist with setting realistic personal goals in these areas, and encourage you to achieve them, right from the moment you awaken after your surgery.

Beginning on the evening after your surgery, you should expect to actively work towards some of the targets outlined on the following pages.
Breathing exercises

At least every hour try to repeat this cycle five times:

- **Deep breaths.** Breathe in slowly as deeply as you comfortably can, then hold for 5 seconds before breathing out.
- **Breathing control.** Normal relaxed breathing.
- **Huffing.** Make an “O” shape with your mouth and breathe out slightly harder, squeezing the breath out like steaming up a mirror or cleaning glasses. Repeat twice.
- **Supported cough.** Use a rolled up towel to support your wound area, or anywhere that you are tender. If pain stops you from being able to cough your nurse will provide additional pain-relief.
Bedside exercises

At least five times a day try one or more of the following exercises at your bedside:

**Seated marching**

In a seated position, lift your leg to bring your knee towards your chest. Repeat 10 times for each leg.

**Side leg raises**

Hold onto a chair or frame for balance and lift your leg out to the side. Repeat 5-10 times each leg.

**Standing squats**

Hold on to your chair and bend your knees to lower your bottom towards the floor. Repeat 5-10 times.
Mobilisation

You should aim to be up and walking as soon as possible after surgery.

We recommend the following staged targets for getting mobile during your recovery from surgery:

- Sit out of bed on your chair.
- Walk to the bathroom. Initially with, and then without assistance.
- Walk away from your bed-space for 5-10 metres.
- Take up to five separate walks per day of increasing length and duration.

Gaining confidence

You may feel that support or assistance is required for your first walk after surgery.

Nurses, physiotherapists and support workers will be happy to help you.

ERAS Walkways

The Enhanced Recovery After Surgery programme has provided walkways with distance-markers in the corridors next to the wards.

When you feel confident ask your nurse or physiotherapist to direct you to one of these walkways.
In order to support the **Fit for Surgery** initiative, **Move More Edinburgh** is delighted to offer free organised activities prior to, and following your surgery:

- Gentle movement
- Walking
- Circuit classes

We can arrange for you to be contacted by a representative from Move More Edinburgh to discuss how best we can help you achieve your goals.

The classes will take place in Edinburgh Leisure venues as well as local community spaces.

Following participation in one or more of the physical activity sessions you will be signposted onto Edinburgh Leisure and community activities to continue with your physical activity.
Summary

We hope that this booklet will help you prepare **mentally and physically** for the challenge of recovering from major surgery. Try setting yourself daily goals based on the advice in this booklet for before and after your operation, and see if you can achieve them.

The key points to remember are:

- Stop smoking
- Cut out excessive alcohol
- Be as active as possible
- Practice breathing and bedside exercises
- Get up-and-about after surgery.

Continue these activities in the weeks after your surgery to help your recovery and rehabilitation.

*Remember we are here to help you recover from surgery.*
*Please feel free to discuss any aspects of the contents of this booklet with Medical or Nursing staff.*
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