

# In shape for surgery

## Q&A

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### **Q: Is this about saving money?**

No. The point of improving people's health prior to surgery is to avoid complications and to improve the outcomes of surgery.

Poorly controlled diabetes, high blood pressure, anaemia, problems with heart rate and the structure of the heart and whether a person smokes or not are all shown to affect how well surgery is likely to go. Please see our evidence document and the links within it for further information.

All of these aspects have the potential to be improved prior to surgery and we are now putting more emphasis on this.

There may be some financial benefits but these are difficult to quantify. If a person spends less time in hospital or needs fewer trips to the GP after surgery because they recover better and sooner, for example, it will effectively cost the NHS less to treat them but this doesn't always free up any actual money.

Many of the areas of health we are targeting to improve before an operation are actually influential on a person's health in the long term too. If we can support people to keep going with health improvement and management of their conditions not just before but after surgery, we hope that this will make them healthier in the long term. Where this happens, they may require less use of the NHS in the future as a consequence of being healthier.

### **Q Are you not doing this already? What is new?**

We do this already to a large extent and there is already a high degree of best practice. GPs work with patients to improve their health and routinely refer people to secondary care specialists and to the various support services available to support healthier lifestyles.

The key change we have made is to make sure that the messages about the importance of pre-operative health that patients receive are the same across primary and secondary care. We want to make sure that patients always think of these messages when proceeding to surgery.

## Planned Care Programme

We have also made sure that the clinical criteria professionals use to judge fitness before an operation are consistent regardless of which GP practices or local hospital you attend. Our review has taken latest evidence into account.

GPs work with patients to improve their health and routinely refer people to the various support services available. We have been looking at how we can help patients to recover better from surgery and doing everything possible to improve patients' general health is one way of doing this. This initiative is designed to ensure that best practice is being followed across the county and that patients realise they have an important role to play in boosting their recovery times by adopting healthier lifestyles. At present, some people's surgery can be cancelled because of these conditions so encouraging healthier lifestyles earlier will reduce the risk of this happening.

### **Does this mean that you have been operating on people who have not been fit enough for surgery?**

Patient need determines whether surgery takes place and a clinician will always balance the risks of a patient having or not having surgery. It does happen that sometimes health issues are picked up later in the pathway so sometimes operations can be cancelled further on in the patient's journey to surgery. We are now taking a standardised approach across Devon. Health improvement will happen earlier in the pathway which means fewer late cancellations and less inconvenience to patients.

### **Q: What about people who are in real pain? These measures will require them to remain in pain for longer.**

It is important for all patients that their operation goes well. All patients will be assessed according to their needs. Assessing those needs balances the need to reduce their risks of complications by waiting slightly longer while treating a medical problem, versus the pain that they may currently be experiencing. This is not a change to current practice. Where patients are in pain and they and their doctor agree that a delay to improve their fitness is best, techniques and treatments for pain management will form part of their treatment where that is needed.

### **What support will you put in place to help me stop smoking?**

You will not be expected to do this alone. Your GP and hospital clinicians will provide information on the various stop smoking services that are there to help you.

Healthy lifestyles support and information can be found here:

- Devon Healthy Lifestyle Service: [www.onesmallstep.org.uk](http://www.onesmallstep.org.uk) or call 0800 298 2654
- One You Plymouth: [www.oneyouplymouth.co.uk](http://www.oneyouplymouth.co.uk) or call 01752 437177
- Torbay Healthy Lifestyle Service:  
[www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/healthy-lifestyles/](http://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/healthy-lifestyles/)
- Cornwall Health Promotion Service: [www.healthpromcornwall.org](http://www.healthpromcornwall.org)

## Planned Care Programme

### Q: Will these services be able to cope with the additional demand?

We have looked at the potential impact of this programme and we believe that the current healthy lifestyle services are well equipped to care for any additional patients who would be accessing them prior to surgery.

### Q: Will you know if someone is still smoking?

Smoking is a risk factor for surgery and it is important that patients are honest about any smoking habit to help their clinicians plan their surgery. There is evidence to suggest that monitoring a patient's carbon monoxide levels is helpful in encouraging a successful attempt to stop smoking. We are adopting carbon monoxide monitoring for patients on this new surgical pathway. This will happen in hospital as part of normal appointments. We understand that it can be very difficult to stop smoking. While completely quitting all forms of smoking is preferred, nicotine replacement therapies including e-cigarettes or 'vaping' are helpful in giving up smoking and acceptable for patients undergoing surgery.

### Q: Is this for all types of surgery? Does this affect emergency surgery?

This relates to referral for non-urgent, elective surgery. It does not affect emergency or urgent surgery. It will be rolled out by specialty, starting with knee replacement, hip replacement and hernias.

### Q: We have seen that other health communities have also set criteria for weight loss for obese patients, prior to surgery. Why have you not done so?

Weight can be important in surgery and is already a consideration, both for people who are very underweight or very overweight. For patients in these categories (Body Mass Index less than 18kg/m<sup>2</sup> or above 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>), their doctors will consider this with them, but this new scheme work does not include any blanket weight threshold for surgery.

### Q: What are the criteria and thresholds for intervention?

The criteria and thresholds for pre-referral medical management intervention are as follows:

Criteria	Threshold for pre-referral intervention
Haemoglobin level, for major surgery or with high anaesthetic risk (excluded if anaemia is due to the patient having an anaemia-causing illness)	Hb < 130 g/L male <u>or</u> Hb < 120 g/L female
HbA1c <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In known diabetics <u>and</u></li></ul>	HbA1c > 69mmol/mol

## Planned Care Programme

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In those at risk of diabetes as identified by a computer-based risk-assessment tool or by a validated self-assessment questionnaire e.g Diabetes Risk Score)</li></ul>	
Irregular Heart Rate (ECG if pulse rate greater than 100 or irregular)	Atrial Fibrillation with a rate greater than 100 beats per minute
Blood Pressure	BP > 160/100mmHg
Auscultate for heart murmur	Un-investigated heart murmur
Smoker	Advise patient: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>8 weeks smoking cessation prior to surgery is optimal to reduce risks;</li><li>It is a good time to consider quitting for good;</li></ul> And sign-post the patient to local smoking cessation service.

For any additional questions, please contact [cab.helpdesk@nhs.net](mailto:cab.helpdesk@nhs.net) who will be able to forward your question to the relevant person for a response.