Exercise & surgery

A guide to how exercise can help you before and after surgery
Important

The information given in this leaflet is not a substitute for proper advice from a doctor.

Appropriate medical advice should be sought in every case and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh can accept no liability for actions taken in reliance upon this leaflet.

Scan this QR code to watch a short video about physical exercise and surgery.
Martine Scott’s healthcare team helped her onto a physical activity programme after an unexpected heart attack.

An exercise plan was suggested by staff in the Coronary Care Unit at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness after I underwent angioplasty for a blood clot that caused me to have a heart attack.

My cardio nurse gave me a six-week recovery programme involving increasing levels of exercise and relaxation. After that, I attended a cardio rehab programme led by physiotherapists at my local hospital.

It’s the simple things that make me healthier - I walk briskly, park further away from where I need to be and take the stairs rather than the lift. I also swim once a week and have exercises I can do at home. I owe it to myself to stay healthy for as long as I can.
Moderate physical activity before and after many types of operation can help with your recovery.

It’s important to agree a physical activity plan with your doctor, but the right kind of exercise can help you get back to normal more quickly, reduce the risk of complications and improve your long-term health.

Exercise before surgery

Patients’ recovery after many types of surgery can be improved with a moderate physical activity plan from about 12 weeks before.

Many of the risks involved in having an operation can be reduced if patients have a healthy weight and good heart and lung health before their operation.

If you are getting ready to have an operation, ask your doctor or surgeon for advice on the best physical activity plan for your condition.

Exercise after surgery

It is very important to ask your doctor or surgeon for advice before doing any exercise after surgery.

With the right medical advice, a physical activity plan will help you get back to normal more quickly by improving your heart and lung health and your strength.

Regular physical activity after surgery can get you moving more quickly by helping the area of the operation to heal.

Your healthcare team should be able to help you plan a 12-week physical activity programme. Carrying on with regular exercise after this will help your general health and wellbeing.

Ask your GP or surgeon about what kind of activity would be right for you and your condition.

Expert opinion

Jon Dearing, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon and Physical Activity Representative for The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

I include discussion about physical activity in consultations with all my patients. However, I always stress it isn’t about getting hot and sweaty in the gym – it’s about walking or cycling instead of taking the car, or taking the stairs rather than the lift. Just 30 minutes of gentle exercise a day can make a huge difference.

There are many types of conditions and procedures that can benefit. Physical activity can improve a patient’s condition by reducing the risk of blood clots and helps to regain muscle strength, but it can also improve their psychological condition following an operation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Regular exercise reduces the risk of blood clots and helps you improve heart and lung health following surgery.