



Smoking and  
***surgery***

Stopping  
smoking lowers  
your risk of  
serious problems  
**during and  
after surgery.**

Doctors strongly  
recommend stopping  
smoking **before surgery.**



# Before surgery – a good time to quit

**To get the best outcome from your surgery, stopping smoking is an important step to take.**

Stopping smoking before surgery lowers your risk of serious problems and may mean:

- faster recovery
- less time in hospital, and
- less need for antibiotics.

The chemicals in cigarettes affect how your body works and how well it copes during and after surgery.

The good news is, your body begins to repair itself as soon as you stop smoking.

Stopping completely is the only way to reverse the damage done by cigarettes.

Cutting down the number of cigarettes you smoke in the weeks before surgery does not reduce the risk of complications.

You can cut down before stopping smoking completely, but your body will only start to recover from the time you stop completely.

**The earlier you quit, the greater your chances of a good recovery.**



**Every week you don't smoke before surgery will help your body cope better with surgery and help your recovery afterwards.**

## **What are the risks from smoking?**

**If you continue to smoke right up to the time you have surgery, you will be more likely to:**

- reduce the oxygen supply to your heart and body
- have difficulty breathing during and after surgery
- increase your risk of wound infection
- increase your risk of lung complications
- slow down or harm the healing of bones, skin and wounds
- reduce how well some pain-relieving and other drugs work.

## Talk to your doctor and surgeon

Let your doctor (general practitioner) and your surgeon know about your smoking.

Also tell them if you are using e-cigarettes (vaping) because it may increase the risk for wound complications.

Make sure the hospital or your surgeon knows all the medications you are taking when you are admitted to hospital.

## Smoking and anaesthesia

When you have surgery, you usually have an anaesthetic drug so the operation can be performed without pain.

Smoking adds to the stress of surgery under anaesthesia by reducing the oxygen supply to your heart and body and increasing the risk of breathing difficulties and infection.

If you smoke, you are more likely to be admitted to intensive care and to need life support.

**If you have heart disease, where your supply of blood and oxygen is already reduced, then it is very important to stop smoking at least 24 hours before surgery.**

Even stopping smoking 24 hours before surgery will help your body get the oxygen it needs.

# When you stop smoking

- After **12 hours** almost all the nicotine is out of your bloodstream. Your blood pressure is more stable and your heart rate is slower. Your heart is less stressed so it needs less oxygen to work properly.
- By **24 hours** the level of carbon monoxide (CO) in your blood has dropped. Carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke replaces some of the oxygen in your blood. As CO drops, your blood can supply **more oxygen** to your heart, muscles and skin.
- By **3 to 4 weeks** your body is better at fighting wound infections, helping surgical cuts to heal.
- By **4 to 6 weeks** you will be less likely to cough. This helps your breathing under anaesthesia and reduces sharp pains from coughing for people with chest or abdominal (gut) surgery.
- By **8 weeks** your risk of lung and breathing complications will be lower than a continuing smoker. These risks include pneumonia and other problems which make it harder to breathe. Your immune system and your response to anaesthetic drugs will also improve.

How well you recover may also depend on other things such as existing medical conditions.

## After surgery – staying stopped

**After surgery, it is important that you do not start smoking again, even if you only quit the day before surgery. Allow your body to recover and heal properly.**

Any gains you made by quitting before surgery will be lost if you start smoking again. Smoking makes recovery harder by stressing your heart and lungs.

Smoking can slow down and interfere with the healing of bones, skin and other body tissues. Smoking narrows the tiny blood vessels in your skin, restricting blood flow and oxygen to wounds trying to heal. Infection is more likely.

In some types of surgery, skin at the site of surgery is more likely to die if you smoke.

**Smoking makes recovery harder by stressing your heart and lungs.**



## Staying smokefree means you:

- help your recovery
- can have a better response to medical treatments and less side effects
- cut your risk of heart attack and stroke
- help protect your eyesight, bone health, teeth and gums
- have a lower risk of lung disease and cancer than if you keep smoking
- save a lot of money.

## Know your triggers

A common reason to smoke is nicotine addiction: your body wants nicotine and starts having cravings and withdrawal. Smoking is also often tied to habits, feelings and being with friends.

### When do you smoke?



Having coffee



With friends



After food



Watching TV



With alcohol



When you're angry, stressed or bored



Other times?



Other emotions?

Once you know your triggers to smoke, you can work out strategies to help manage them.



## Planning to quit

You won't be able to smoke while you are in hospital, so take this chance to stop for good.

### **The best way to stop is a combined approach.**

#### **Effective stop-smoking products to reduce cravings.**

Use a **nicotine patch together with a faster-acting nicotine product** (such as a lozenge, inhalator, spray or gum) **OR a prescription medicine** (Champix or Zyban).

Talk to your doctor about what's best for you.

Champix, Zyban, and nicotine patches, lozenges and gum are available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). This means they are much cheaper if they are prescribed by a doctor.

### **PLUS**

#### **Tailored support to help you manage your triggers to smoke.**

Options include:

- Quitline 13 7848
- your doctor, or
- visit [quitlinesa.org.au](http://quitlinesa.org.au) to have a confidential conversation with a Quitline counsellor.



## Call the **Quitline 13 7848**

If you are finding stopping smoking hard, or you are a heavy smoker, you're not alone! Talking with a Quitline counsellor can increase your chance of stopping smoking successfully.

### **What is Quitline?**

Quitline is a friendly telephone service. We care and we don't judge. You don't have to be ready to quit to call. We'll work with you no matter where you're at with your smoking. Your call is confidential. This means you don't have to give your name if you don't want to. Quitline counsellors are trained experts and understand that stopping smoking is challenging.

A Quitline counsellor will listen carefully and provide practical, tailored advice just for you.

## **How do I call Quitline?**

**Call 13 7848** for the cost of a local call on your phone.

Or simply enter your name and phone number at **[www.quitlinesa.org.au/request-a-callback/](http://www.quitlinesa.org.au/request-a-callback/)**.

Or you, a worker or doctor can fill out a referral at **[www.quitlinesa.org.au/helping-others-to-quit/helping-your-patients-and-clients/refer-a-client-to-quitline/](http://www.quitlinesa.org.au/helping-others-to-quit/helping-your-patients-and-clients/refer-a-client-to-quitline/)** and send it off by fax or online.

## **What happens on the phone?**

A typical first call to Quitline takes around 10 to 20 minutes. It covers:

- how long you've been smoking
- why you want to stop
- understanding why you smoke
- managing stress
- advice on ways to stop smoking and how to use products.

A Quitline counsellor will work with you to figure out how they can help you on future calls.

**Aboriginal Quitline counsellors are also available.**

**Quitline also uses interpreter services for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.**

# For advice or practical help

## Quitline 13 7848

Quitline is a friendly, confidential telephone service that can offer you tailored information and advice. For the cost of a local call from your phone, Quitline counsellors provide encouragement and support to help you stop smoking.

### **Go online: [www.quitlinesa.org.au](http://www.quitlinesa.org.au)**

Build your personal quit plan with easy-to-find information suited to you. You'll find tips, distractions, a cost calculator and stories from ex-smokers. You can even have a confidential conversation with a Quitline counsellor online.

