

# Information for Patients



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN  
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

## Stop Smoking Before Surgery

### Background

The need for an operation is a significant event in your life. If you smoke, then you have a higher chance of experiencing complications during and after surgery. This can be the time for you to act and stop smoking.

Smoking is an addictive behaviour. Maybe you have already attempted to stop smoking before. With the need for surgery coming up, have a good think about taking the step of quitting smoking.

Discuss this with your doctors (anaesthetist, GP, surgeon), nurses, family and friends. Many people who have surgery do successfully quit smoking.

Stopping smoking when you know that you need surgery is best. The longer you go without cigarettes before an operation, the better; several weeks or months prior to surgery is preferable, but even a few days will help you.

### **Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of premature disease and death in Australia and New Zealand**

Every year, tobacco use kills, on average, 15,550 people in Australia and 5,000 in New Zealand. That is more than 56 lives lost to tobacco related causes every day.

### **Tobacco smoke contains over 4000 chemicals, of which more than 60 are known to cause cancers**

Cancerous chemicals include Arsenic, Polonium 210 and Vinyl Chloride, all of which reach the brain and heart within 10 seconds of inhalation. Tobacco smoke contains many other toxins such as Ammonia (commonly used in toilet cleaner), Hydrogen Cyanide (found in rat poison), and Acetone (the main ingredient in nail polish remover).

### **Smokers lose on average one decade of life expectancy compared with people who have never smoked**

Smokers can be expected to live for 10 years less than those who have never smoked. It is estimated that out of all lifetime users of tobacco, half will die as a result of their habit.

### **Surgical outcomes are worse for smokers than non-smokers**

The risk of complications during and after surgery is higher for smokers than non-smokers. Smokers are more likely to have difficulty breathing during surgery, suffer from infections and take longer to recover. Smokers are also 30 percent more likely to die than non-smokers within 30 days of their operation.

### **Cessation of smoking up to 24 hours before surgery improves outcomes**

- Within 24 hours, more oxygen will reach your heart and your blood pressure will improve.
- After one week, your lungs will become better at removing mucus, tar and dust.
- After six weeks, your immune system will be better at fighting off infections.

### **About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons**

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia, these being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.