Surgery and Smoking

You can improve your chances for a successful outcome after surgery if you are a nonsmoker or have stopped smoking, according to researchers. In two specific types of surgeries (spinal fusion and rotator cuff repairs), results were significantly better for people who never smoked and for those who stopped smoking than for smokers.

Smoking and Spinal Fusion Surgery

Spinal fusion surgery is often used to treat disk disorders in the neck and the lower back. Two or more of the small bones in the spinal column (vertebrae) are "welded" together with bone grafts and internal devices, such as metal rods.

The success of the surgery depends on how well the bones heal into a solid unit. A successful spinal fusion can reduce pain and improve the patient's ability to perform activities of daily living.

In a study on spinal fusions in the lower back, the success rate was 80 to 85 percent for patients who never smoked or who quit smoking after their surgery. The success rate dropped to under 73 percent for smokers. More than 70 percent of nonsmokers and previous smokers were able to return to work. But only about half of the smokers were able to resume working. Another study on spinal fusions in the neck showed successful fusion in 81 percent of nonsmokers, but in only 62 percent of smokers.

Smoking and Rotator Cuff Surgery

Smoking also has a negative impact on surgeries that focus on muscles, such as rotator cuff repairs. One study compared the results of 235 patients treated at two different medical institutions. Results in nonsmokers were significantly better than results in smokers. Nonsmokers experienced less pain and a higher degree of function after surgery than smokers. Good or excellent results were seen in 84 percent of nonsmokers, but in only 35 percent of smokers.

Evidence like this continues to indicate that smoking is harmful, not only to your lungs, but also to your bones and muscles.

Quit Smoking Now

Now is the time to quit smoking! This minute, today, this week, before your next birthday. Taking it one step at a time is what the American Lung Association's Freedom from Smoking® Online program is all about. The new online smoking cessation clinic is based on the Lung Association's Freedom From Smoking® program, which has already helped thousands of smokers quit smoking for good.

Freedom from Smoking® Online is an interactive course that is designed to educate and modify the behavior patterns of a smoker. The program can be accessed day or night, seven days a week, on any schedule the smoker chooses. There are no waiting lists in this program - -it's ready whenever a smoker wants to start the process of quitting, and it's free of charge. Visit the American Lung Association's Freedom From Smoking® Online program today at the American Lung Associations website (http://www.lungusa.org)

Last reviewed: July 2007
AAOS does not endorse any treatments, procedures, products, or physicians referenced herein. This information is provided as an educational service and is not intended to serve as medical advice. Anyone seeking specific orthopaedic advice or assistance should consult his or her orthopaedic surgeon, or locate one in your area through the AAOS "Find an Orthopaedist" program on this website.

Copyright 2007 American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Related Links

the American Lung Associations website (http://www.lungusa.org)

OrthoInfo
The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
6300 N. River Road
Rosemont, IL 60018
Phone: 847.823.7186
Email: orthoinfo@aaos.org