



# Preparing for orthopaedic surgery – changes you can make for a successful outcome and faster recovery

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Understanding the risks of surgery and how to be as fit as possible for your operation to give you the best chance of a fast and successful outcome.

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## Why preparing for surgery is important

Orthopaedic surgery can be a life-changing step to reduce pain and improve mobility, but success isn't just about the operation itself, it is also about how well you prepare for it.

Ensuring your body is in the best possible condition before surgery will set you up for a smoother recovery. This process of 'prehabilitation', or 'prehab', will reduce pain after surgery, speed up healing, and improve long-term outcomes.

The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust provides safe and effective care that successfully promotes swift recovery and gives you the best outcomes. But all surgery has risks, including orthopaedic surgery. These risks are very slight, but important to know about.

## What are the risks of orthopaedic surgery?

- **Surgical site infections (SSI's):** Infections at the site of your surgery is a significant risk with orthopaedic surgery. They are rare, but where they do occur, they can be life or limb threatening, with some more risky than some common cancers.<sup>1</sup> Joint infections can leave your mobility worse than before surgery, mean months or even years on medication, multiple hospital admissions and require further surgical procedures.
- **Blood clots:** Deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism, often triggered by reduced mobility after orthopaedic surgery.
- **Nerve and vessel damage:** Causing numbness or weakness, or damage to blood vessels.
- **Implant issues:** Loosening, breakage, or dislocation of implants like joint replacements.
- **Delayed healing:** Failure or delay of bone healing, especially in fracture repairs.
- **Stiffness and pain:** Ongoing pain or reduced range of movement after surgery.
- **Deconditioning and difficulty mobilising:** Associated with pain among frail patients, 'deconditioning' is a physical and mental decline that happens when a person is inactive, bedridden, or not using their muscles. It can be a 'vicious circle', where pain or illness causes a person to move less, which makes them weaker, leading to even less movement.
- **Medical complications:** Reactions to anaesthesia, breathing or heart issues, urine (pee) retention.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12187470/#:~:text=33,79%20years%20to%20be%2019%25>.

## How do we reduce these risks?

In our hospital, we adopt the highest standards of clinical care, cleanliness and infection control, following best practice guidelines to minimise the risks to you, but there are things you can also do to reduce the risk of post-operative complications. Many are helpful even before you consider surgery, and can even reduce the need for it in the first place.





### There are 4 main risk factors where lifestyle changes can help:

- 1. Being overweight.** This is measured by Body Mass Index (BMI) – a number related to your height and weight. It can be calculated by your GP practice or by our team, and shows if someone is at a healthy weight, underweight, overweight, or obese. A high BMI increases the risk of wound complications and infection, reducing blood supply to tissues, placing extra strain on surgical wounds, and making healing slower and less effective. The risk of surgical site infections increases rapidly when a patient has a BMI of 37.5. Operations on such patients also take longer, which increases the risk of blood clots and infection. Also, a high BMI can make physiotherapy exercises difficult after surgery, leading to a slower recovery or longer stays in hospital.  
 The NHS website has a calculator to work out your BMI, visit [www.nhs.uk/health-assessment-tools/calculate-your-body-mass-index/calculate-bmi-for-adults](http://www.nhs.uk/health-assessment-tools/calculate-your-body-mass-index/calculate-bmi-for-adults)
- 2. Smoking and vaping:** Smoking and vaping reduce blood flow and oxygen delivery to tissues. This impairs healing and significantly increases the risk of infection, wound breakdown, and failure of surgery.
- 3. Drinking too much alcohol** affects the immune system, reduces your ability to fight infection, and can interfere with normal wound healing. It also increases the risk of complications during and after surgery.
- 4. Poorly controlled diabetes:** High blood sugar levels make it harder for the body to fight infection and heal wounds. Uncontrolled diabetes is strongly associated with a higher risk of serious surgical site infections.

## Our responsibilities to you

While you are under our care, we will balance the risks and benefits of surgery and we won't just proceed with surgery until we know you have the best possible chance of a successful outcome. Addressing these risk factors will greatly reduce the risk of infection and improve the safety and success of surgery. For the vast majority of people, surgery can proceed once these risk factors are better controlled.

Our focus is on helping you to achieve the following lifestyle changes:

Achieving and keeping a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 37.5 or less.		Committing to stopping alcohol before your surgery.	
Committing to stop smoking (or vaping) before your surgery.		Maintaining control over diabetes (blood tests regularly showing HbA1c below 69mmol/ml).	

## Your responsibilities

You need to do your part in achieving these lifestyle changes to give yourself the best chance of a successful surgery and speedy recovery.

You may be tested and monitored to ensure you are making and maintaining these changes. If you are unable to, your operation may need to be cancelled, up to and including on the scheduled day of surgery.

## Additional help and support

If you know that you have one or more of the risk factors above, then we strongly urge you to look at how you can improve your health in the weeks and months leading up to your operation. Help and advice is available through several sources, including your GP and through NHS prehabilitation services.

The following NHS apps (available through the App Store or Google Play Store) and resources can help support you on your prehab journey.



**Good luck preparing for your orthopaedic surgery!**

## Useful numbers and contacts

Orthopaedics Administrative Team (CAT5) 0118 322 7415 or email [rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net](mailto:rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net)

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Orthopaedic Unit, March 2026.

Next review due: March 2028.