

# Updated Fitness for Elective Surgery Policy

## Questions and Answers for patients

### THE POLICY

#### 1. What does the fitness for elective surgery policy cover?

This policy is about losing weight and stopping smoking prior to elective surgery.

#### 2. Why is there a policy in place?

Our aim is to make sure that patients are in the best possible health before they have a routine operation. There is strong evidence that surgery carries significantly higher risk for people who are very overweight, both on the operation table and when making their recovery. If a patient is very overweight, they are much more likely to suffer serious breathing problems and develop infections, as well as heart, kidney and lung complications. When people are overweight, it takes them longer to recover from surgery and they have a higher risk of dying under anaesthetic. The same is true for people who smoke.

The policy is also intended to help people here in Hertfordshire become healthier in the longer term. Being very overweight or a smoker means patients have a higher risk of getting diabetes, heart disease, liver problems and certain types of cancer and of having a stroke. More and more people are becoming obese across the UK and suffering from these debilitating conditions.

There is good evidence that a 'medical trigger' such as needing to lose weight for an operation, can often provide the incentive people need to make changes to improve their own health.

#### 3. Who was involved in developing the policy?

Existing policies have been in place since 2012 in East and North Hertfordshire CCG and 2016 in Herts Valleys CCG. This is an update to those policies. The original policy was developed with input from the GPs on East and North Hertfordshire CCG and Herts Valleys CCG's Governing Body/Board. The review of clinical evidence which led to this amended policy was carried out by GP fellows and public health consultants.

#### 4. Why is the policy changing?

The original policy was designed to help people get in better physical shape before they have non-urgent surgery, in order to improve the safety of that surgery and their recovery afterwards.

Following a public consultation in the summer of 2017, we are now introducing a revised set of criteria to keep up-to-date with current evidence around the risks of smoking and also the amount

of weight that a patient needs to lose before their health improves, and their readiness for surgery improves.

#### **5. When will changes take effect?**

The updated policy will start on 1 January 2020. It will apply to all new referrals for non-urgent routine surgery for procedures that require special funding approval from the CCGs.

The updated policy will start on 1 April 2020 for all other planned procedures that do not need special funding approval from the CCGs.

#### **6. What happens if I was referred for surgery before the change, but I haven't yet had my surgery?**

Any referrals made before 1 January 2020 will follow the criteria in the previous policy.

#### **7. Does the policy apply to all surgery?**

The policy applies to routine surgery only - not emergency surgery and surgery undertaken under general anaesthetic or an epidural or spinal anaesthetic but not local anaesthetic.

#### **8. Are exceptions made to the policy?**

Yes, exceptions are made when:

- patients need urgent or emergency surgery
- patients need surgery for cancer, or suspected cancer
- patients have surgery under local anaesthetic
- patients need heart surgery, cardiothoracic surgery, neurosurgery or fracture procedures
- a doctor considers that the risk to a patient of waiting for an operation outweighs the benefits of losing weight
- a patient has a BMI of 30-40, is not having hip, knee or spinal surgery and does not have 'metabolic syndrome'. For a definition of what metabolic syndrome is, please refer to the Fitness for Elective Surgery policy on your CCG website.

The policy only applies to those aged 18 and over.

### **BODY WEIGHT AND BMI**

#### **9. Why is BMI being used as a measure of health?**

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the standard measure used across the NHS. It takes into account natural variations in body shape, giving a healthy weight range for a particular height. For the small

number of patients who have a large proportion of muscle mass, GPs will be able to indicate this on the patient's referral form.

#### **10. How do I find out what my BMI is?**

Visit [www.nhs.uk/BMI](http://www.nhs.uk/BMI) if you want to calculate your own BMI.

#### **11. What help is there in Hertfordshire to help people lose weight?**

Printed factsheets are available at GP practices. Two of the key initiatives are:

- Hertfordshire County Council funds a FREE 12-week subscription to [WW](#) (formally known as WeightWatchers). Adults with a BMI of 30 and over are eligible for this with a few exceptions (those who have an eating disorder; those who have paid for WW themselves in the past 3 months and those who have received a free WW course in the past 18 months). Your GP can refer you.
- Men only 'Shape up' evening courses are run by Watford Football Club at locations all over the county, including Watford, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Borehamwood, South Oxhey, Hitchin and Hatfield. Places can be booked by visiting [www.shapeupherts.com](http://www.shapeupherts.com)

#### **12. What happens if I don't manage to lose weight?**

After 9 months, if you haven't managed to achieve your target weight, you should make a follow-up appointment with your GP practice to talk about your health and your need for surgery.

Your GP will make sure that you're getting all the help that you need and will discuss with specialists whether it is safe for you to have an operation despite not reaching your target weight.

#### **13. Can my doctor refer me for tests or a consultant's opinion before I have started my weight loss?**

Depending on your health problem, your GP can refer you for tests or to see a specialist before you have lost weight. If the specialist feels you need a non-urgent routine operation, the hospital will write to inform your doctor and you will be discharged back to their care whilst you lose weight.

Your GP will then help to get you the support you need to achieve your target weight before your operation. Once you have met your target weight, you will be re-referred back to the specialist.

#### **14. How much weight do I need to lose before my non-urgent operation?**

It's important that you lose enough weight to reduce the risk of complications both during and after your operation.

If your BMI is between 30 and 40, you will need to either:

- lose at least 10% of your body weight, or
- reduce your weight until your BMI is less than 30.

If your BMI is over 40, you will need to either:

- lose at least 15% of your body weight, or
- reduce your weight until your BMI is less than 40 – whichever is the greater amount.

### **15. How quickly do I need to lose weight?**

We recommend that you use the advice and help available to try to achieve your target weight loss slowly and steadily. It's important to remember that you need to maintain your new healthier weight right up to the day of your operation and beyond, so that your risk of complications is reduced.

Your GP should review your progress 9 months after your target weight has been agreed. If you lose weight more quickly than this, contact your GP to let them know.

## **SMOKING**

### **16. What does the policy say in regards to smoking?**

People who smoke and are referred for routine, non-urgent operations under general, spinal or epidural anaesthetic need to give up smoking or switch entirely to e-cigarettes for at least 8 weeks before their operation takes place.

### **17. Where can I find a Stop Smoking Service?**

Stop Smoking Advisers are available at hundreds of clinics across Hertfordshire. Some advisers are based in GP surgeries.

Find a clinic near you: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/stopsmoking](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/stopsmoking) or call 0800 389 3998 and talk to an adviser.

The service will contact you within 48 hours. They have advisers who will:

- provide weekly support for up to 12 weeks, either face-to-face or over the phone
- advise on nicotine replacement therapy, e-cigarettes and other products

This service is free, but you will need to pay for any prescriptions you might need, unless in receipt of a prescription exemption certificate.

### **18. What if I want to stop smoking without the help of a Stop Smoking Service?**

If you would rather stop smoking independently, that's fine, although you are four times more likely to quit with expert help. You will still need to get in touch with a Stop Smoking Adviser and tell them when you plan to stop smoking. The Adviser will be in contact again after four weeks and eight weeks.

### **19. What happens once I have stopped smoking for 8 weeks?**

Congratulate yourself – you are on the road to a healthier future. Eight weeks after you stop smoking, your smoking status will be tested by a Stop Smoking Adviser, either at your GP practice or a local clinic. This is a simple breath test which takes less than 30 seconds.

If you have successfully quit smoking for at least 8 weeks, you will be given a 'Smokefree' certificate. You will need to bring this certificate to your pre-operative assessment clinic and you may be asked to show it to your GP.

### **20. What happens if I haven't managed to stop smoking?**

If after nine months you have tried to stop smoking twice without success, your Stop Smoking Adviser will contact the doctor who referred you and ask them to review your case.

Your GP will make sure that you're getting all the help that you need and will discuss with hospital specialists whether it is safe for you to have an operation despite the fact that you are still smoking.

### **21. Can my doctor still refer me for tests or a consultant's opinion?**

Your GP could decide to refer you for tests and specialist opinion when you are ready to start your quit attempt, or they might ask you to wait until you have successfully quit smoking first.

## **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

### **22. What if my condition changes during the 9 month period?**

If you feel that there is a change in your health or wellbeing which means that your need for an operation has become more urgent, make an appointment with your GP. Your GP can review the urgency of your situation with you.

### **23. Where do I go if I have any concerns or queries?**

If you have any questions about the support available to lose weight or stop smoking, please ask at your GP practice. Or speak to a Stop Smoking Adviser, using the contact details in this document.

You can also contact your CCG using the contact details below.

### **East and North Hertfordshire CCG**

Phone: 01707 685000

Email: [enhertsccg.enquiries@nhs.net](mailto:enhertsccg.enquiries@nhs.net)

Write to: Quality Team, East and North Hertfordshire CCG, Charter House, Parkway, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6JL

Website: [www.enhertsccg.nhs.uk/FitForSurgery](http://www.enhertsccg.nhs.uk/FitForSurgery)

### **Herts Valleys CCG**

Phone: 01442 898888

Email: [enquiries.hvccg@nhs.net](mailto:enquiries.hvccg@nhs.net)

Write to: Quality Team, Herts Valleys CCG, The Forum, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 1DN

Website: [www.hertsvalleysccg.nhs.uk/FitForSurgery](http://www.hertsvalleysccg.nhs.uk/FitForSurgery)