York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Getting You Fitter

For Complex Abdominal Wall Reconstruction (CAWR) Surgery

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Helping you to improve your recovery following surgery and reduce your risk of complication



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This leaflet is a guide to help you prepare for Complex Abdominal Wall Reconstruction (CAWR) surgery. It describes the lifestyle changes that you can make to improve your outcome following surgery and shows you the support that is available. Your doctor will answer any additional questions that you might have which are not covered in this leaflet.

Introduction

Complex Abdominal Wall Reconstruction is a major operation. It is normal for you to feel anxious about it. The aim of this leaflet is to help you prepare for your surgery.

When you have a big operation, it puts stress on your body. Improving your physical fitness and mental wellbeing will help your body cope with that stress. People who are fitter seem to recover more quickly and have fewer complications following surgery. This means they spend less time in hospital and return to their normal daily activities more quickly.

The general complications that can occur with this operation include:

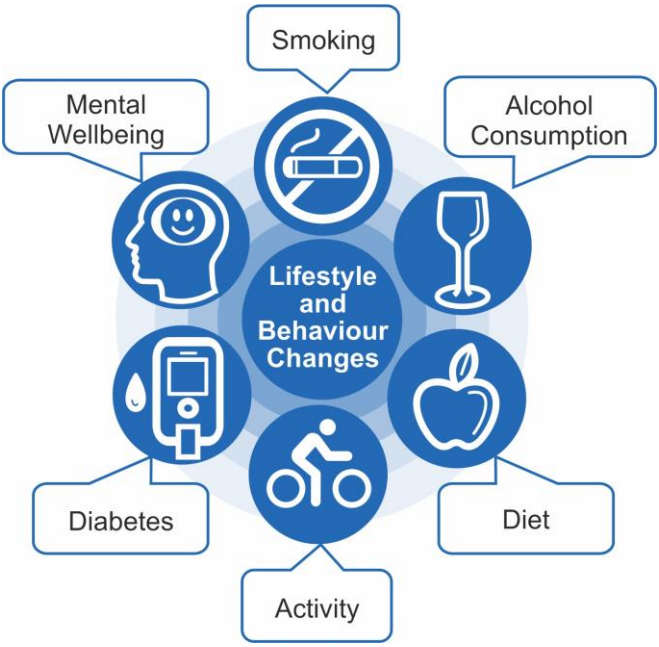
- Problems with your surgical wound. For example, infection in the wound or the wound not healing properly.
- Problems that can happen with any type of surgery. These include ‘clots in the legs’ (deep vein thrombosis), stroke, heart attack and lung infections.

We know there are certain things that affect the way the body copes with surgery.
These include

- smoking
- being obese or overweight
- being malnourished
- being physically inactive
- having poorly controlled diabetes
- regularly drinking more than the recommended amount of alcohol

Before your operation, the surgical team will assess your risk of getting complications. The team will do what they can to reduce this risk but **you have the key role** in preparing **yourself** for surgery.

When you see your surgeon in the clinic, he/she will help you identify the risk factors that apply to you. We appreciate that changing your lifestyle and habits is not easy, but your doctor and the surgical team will help you decide where to focus your efforts. You will find some general advice about how to change long standing habits and behaviours on page 34 of this leaflet.



We recommend you aim for the following:

- If you are a smoker, stop smoking
- If you are overweight, reach a healthy weight
- Eat healthily
- Increase your level of physical activity
- If you have diabetes, make sure your blood glucose level is well controlled
- If you drink alcohol, do not drink more than the recommended daily allowance
- Look after your mental health and wellbeing

If you can make the recommended changes to your lifestyle:

- You are less likely to develop breathing problems after surgery
- You are less likely to need prolonged oxygen therapy to help with breathing after your surgery
- You are less likely to be admitted to the intensive care unit
- You are less likely to have a heart attack or stroke
- Your wounds are more likely to heal properly
- You are more likely to have a quicker recovery time and get home sooner
- You are less likely to need readmission to hospital after you are discharged

Advice and sources of help

In the next section of this leaflet you will find some advice and sources of help for:

1. Giving up smoking
2. Losing weight and improving your diet
3. Becoming more active
4. Controlling your diabetes
5. Reducing how much alcohol you drink
6. Improving your mental wellbeing

1. **Smoking**



If you are a smoker then the best thing you can do is to give up smoking completely. We recommend that you should stop smoking for **at least four to six weeks** before your operation. We know this is sometimes hard.

Cutting down or stopping smoking altogether will help improve your lung function after surgery.

If you are a smoker then this **significantly increases** your risk of developing complications after surgery.

- Smoking makes the walls of your arteries sticky from the chemicals in the tobacco and this allows fatty deposits to build up in the blood vessels.
- If the arteries carrying oxygen to your heart and brain get clogged up and damaged, this can lead to a heart attack or stroke.
- It can also reduce blood flow making surgical wounds less likely to close up and heal, and more likely to become infected.
- You may find it harder to breathe after the operation and this can lead to developing a chest infection. If the chest infection gets worse, you may need to be cared for on an intensive care unit.

If you develop a complication after surgery, you could prolong your recovery and delay your discharge from hospital.

If you stop smoking before the surgery:

- ✓ You are less likely to develop breathing problems or a heart attack or stroke
- ✓ You are more likely to recover faster and get home sooner
- ✓ Your wounds are more likely to heal better

Why is giving up smoking hard?

Giving up smoking is hard because there are chemicals in tobacco, such as nicotine, which can be habit forming.

When nicotine enters the body, it triggers pleasure receptors in the brain making our brain link smoking with feeling good. The more nicotine that enters the body the more receptors are created. When you haven't had a cigarette for some time the nicotine receptors become empty and this leads to increased craving and withdrawal symptoms.

The brain's natural response is to stimulate you to have a cigarette. This stimulation can cause unpleasant effects such as headaches, anxiety, insomnia, nausea and sweating. However, these symptoms can be managed by taking an appropriate nicotine replacement therapy.

E-cigarettes

While E-cigarettes contain fewer of the harmful chemicals found in tobacco they are **not** completely safe and long term affects have not been fully studied. There have been reports of people developing severe damage to their lungs.

I am ready to quit smoking and I would like help

You are four times more likely to quit smoking with the help of ‘stop smoking’ services. Appropriate nicotine replacement (NRT) avoids the withdrawal symptoms without the risks and support stopping smoking on a long term basis.
You can access help in several ways.



Online resources:

Visit: www.nhs.uk/smokefree

This website has lots of free resources including personalised ‘quit plans’ and hints and tips. There are links to online support groups and to local stop smoking services. The site allows you to search for services near you by using your postcode.

Visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking

Resources include information on how stopping smoking can improve your health. This website also provides advice and help on how to stop smoking.

Your GP or pharmacist

Your GP can help you quit smoking by referring you to a ‘stop smoking’ clinic. They can also give advice about nicotine replacement therapy or ‘stop smoking’ medication. Your local pharmacist is also able to give advice about nicotine replacement therapies.

Your local ‘Stop Smoking’ service

Local advisors provide expert advice, support and encouragement to help you stop smoking either individually or in a group session.

You can refer yourself to your local stop smoking service. Your local service will usually be run by the council you pay tax to.

If you are not sure which council this is, you can find out by going to the following website and typing in your post code www.nhs.uk/smokefree

You can also call the NHS Smokefree helpline on 0300 123 1044

TIP: Go to the NHS Smokefree helpline

What are the key messages?

What points will you take away and put into action to help you stop smoking?

Other organisations

Information about local services for the following areas:

City of York residents
Yorwellbeing
01904 553 377
Visit: www.yorwellbeing.org.uk

North Yorkshire County Council residents
Living Well Smokefree
01609 797 272
Visit: www.northyorks.gov.uk/stopping-smoking

East Riding of Yorkshire residents
Your Health Trainers
0800 9177752 or text QUIT to 60163
Visit: www.nhs-health-trainers.co.uk/services/east-riding-of-yorkshire/stop-smoking/

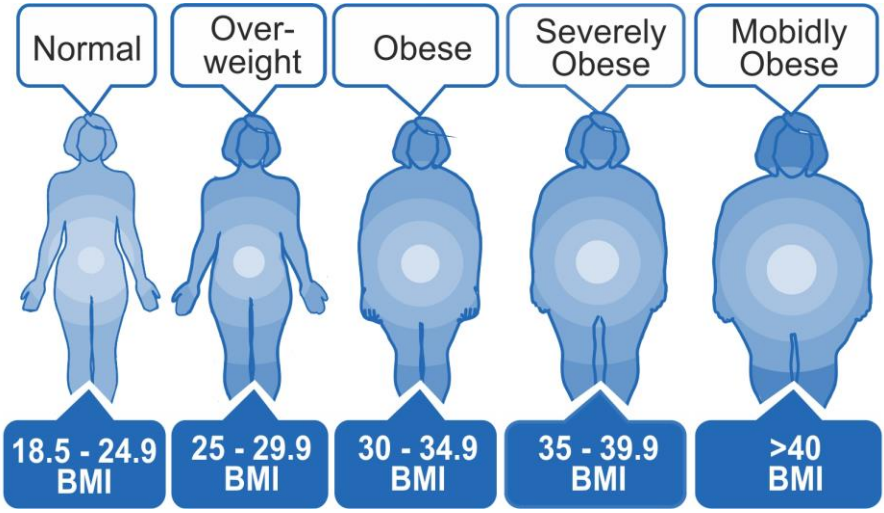
If you decide today you would like a referral, we will make this referral for you.

2. **Your Weight**



Being obese or overweight
Obesity is a word that describes a person who is very overweight. It is a common problem in the UK. The NHS has a useful website which gives a lot of detail about obesity. Visit https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obesity/

The most widely used method of checking if you are obese or overweight is to calculate your body mass index (BMI).



Your dietitian will calculate your BMI and you should record your details below.

Date: …….. Height: ……

Weight: …..…… BMI: ……..……

If you are overweight or obese this **significantly increases** your risk of developing complications from surgery. The heavier you are, the greater these risks are:

- Collapse of the tiny airway channels in your lungs making it harder to breathe. This increases your risk of developing a chest infection and of needing oxygen therapy after surgery. If a chest infection gets worse you may also need to be cared for on an intensive care unit.
- Blocking the blood vessels in the heart with fatty deposits starves your heart muscle of oxygen and increases your risk of developing a heart attack.
- You are more likely to develop diabetes. If this is not picked up early and controlled, it can lead to problems such as: kidney disease, heart disease, sight loss, nerve damage and circulation problems.
- Your wound is less likely to heal properly and is more likely to break down because of reduced blood flow to the healing wound edges.
- You are more likely to develop blood clots due to increased oestrogen in the body which increases the risk of blood clots. Although blood clots develop in the legs they can break off and travel to the blood vessels in your lungs. Developing a clot in your lung can make it harder for you to breathe. It can also sometimes be fatal.

You are more likely to develop complications from a general anaesthetic:

- ✘ We may find it difficult to insert a breathing tube in your windpipe to help you breathe during the operation.
- ✘ Your oxygen levels may drop more quickly than someone who is not overweight.
- ✘ You may be more sensitive to sedative drugs and pain killers that can make it harder for you to breathe after the surgery.

Being overweight or obese can also make the operation longer and riskier to perform.

If you lose weight before surgery:

- ✓ It can make it easier and safer to perform surgery making it less likely to have surgical complications.
- ✓ You are less likely to develop breathing problems (such as a chest infection) and are less likely to need oxygen therapy and be cared for on an intensive care unit after the surgery.
- ✓ Your wounds are more likely to heal quickly and you are less likely to develop a wound infection.
- ✓ You have less chance of developing diabetes.
- ✓ You are more likely to recover faster and have a shorter stay in hospital.

TIP: If you are overweight

What do you feel are the main things that have caused you to be overweight?

I am ready to lose weight and I would like help
Our dietitian will help you choose a specific weight loss plan which is tailored to your needs.

Online resources

The NHS Weight Loss Plan

Visit: www.nhs.uk/livewell/loseweight

You can download the NHS free 12 week diet and exercise plan which has been designed to help you lose weight safely and keep it off.

Visit: www.nhs.uk/BetterHealth

The plan helps with safe and sustainable weight loss and teaches you how to make healthier food choices. It offers you extra support from an online community and gives you the skills to prevent you regaining weight.

TIP: Read the NHS Weight Loss plan

What are the key messages?

What action(s) do you think will help you lose your excess weight?

The Eatwell Guide

Visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide
This site has information about the foods that make up a healthy diet, how to get the right balance of each food group in your meals and portion sizes.

TIP: Read the Eatwell Guide
How does your diet compare to the guide?
What could you do to improve your own diet?

Your GP

If your BMI is over 25 and you have certain other medical problems, your GP may be able to refer you to a 12 week weight management course. Your GP can also refer you to 'Healthwise' which is a local exercise programme designed to help people with long-term conditions start exercising safely.

Books

1. The Compassionate mind approach to beating overeating: using compassion focused therapy

Ken Goss 2011
This book is based on compassion focused therapy, a researched based therapy that incorporates CBT, mindfulness, and other approaches. It helps you understand your urges to overeat so that you can develop a happier relationship with food.

2. The weight escape: stop fad dieting, start losing weight and reshape your life using cutting-edge psychology.

Joseph Ciarrochi, Ann Bailey and Russ Harris 2015
This book is based on acceptance and commitment therapy, useful approach to identify mental barriers to achieving our goals. It provides a useful insight and mindfulness into how you live and what you eat.

Commercial weight loss programmes:

Companies such as Weightwatchers and Slimming World run courses in most areas. These courses support you to lose weight and help you meet other people in your community with the same goal.

https://www.weightwatchers.com/uk/
https://www.slimmingworld.co.uk/

Malnutrition and eating well

You can be malnourished regardless of whether you are overweight or underweight. This is because you may not be getting the right amount of vitamins and minerals needed for good wound healing and recovery. An appropriate nutritional state allows the body to react properly to the stresses of surgery and recover in a faster and more efficient manner.

If you are malnourished this increases your risk of developing complications from the surgery:

- Your skin is more fragile and prone to tears and pressure sores.
- Your bones are more brittle and prone to fractures.
- Your wounds are more likely to take longer to heal.
- You will be more prone to develop wound infections and chest infections.
- You are more likely to have a slower recovery time and may need to stay in hospital longer.
- You are at a higher risk of dying.

Eating a balanced diet means you are less likely to be malnourished. This will mean you have better reserves to cope with surgery and a stronger immune system to fight infection. You will also have better energy levels to speed up your recovery and shorten your hospital stay.

I want to eat well and I would like help

Our specialist dietitian will give you personalised information to help you improve your nutrition in a healthy way

Online resources

The Eatwell Guide:

Visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide

This will give you information about the foods that make up a healthy diet, how to get the right balance of each food group in your meals and help planning portion sizes

Visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/advice-for-underweight-adults

This site has information for people who are underweight. It explains how to put on weight safely and gives tips to boost your calorie intake.

Your GP

If you are worried you have an eating disorder or are unable to gain weight despite trying, then please speak to your GP.

Our specialist dietitian

Our clinic has a specialist dietitian who can help by giving you personalised information to help improve your nutrition in a healthy way.

4. **Physical Activity**



Physical activity helps your overall fitness and also your muscle strength. When physical activity is combined with healthy eating it improves your ability to lose weight.

Don’t worry if you currently have low levels of physical activity. You can improve your fitness in as little as four weeks. This can be done by taking regular exercise such as brisk walking, swimming, cycling or gardening. They are all helpful.

Some people find it hard to be physically active due to the hernia. Some find it limiting to go jogging or cycling. Some cannot bend to do gardening. It is important for you to find an activity that you enjoy. Some find gyms intimidating at first but then start enjoying it after making the first few moves. Some patients find they need a personal trainer in a small local gym to help them build their confidence and take the first few steps towards getting fit. If the gym is not for you, you may want to consider social activities like line dancing.

Your journey will be unique to you and with perseverance you will make progress

Before undertaking any new activity we would advise you to check with your doctor that the type of activity is appropriate for you.

Improving physical fitness

We recommend*:*

- Exercising for a minimum of 30 minutes a day and at least five times a week.
- Exercise at a continuous moderate level for the 30 minutes so that you feel like your heart is beating faster and your body feels warm.
- The exercise should leave you breathless but **not** speechless.

If you find physical activity challenging**:**

- Start with a lesser amount of time and work up gradually to the 30 minutes.
- Start with what you can do and build this up gradually to the recommendations above.
- Increase your level of activity once you feel able to do so.

Building muscle strength

We recommend:

- Using weights to help build muscle strength in your arms and legs.
- Start with a small weight such as 1kg and then slowly building up to heavier weights. The weight you build up to is one that you find a challenge to do. You can use household objects such as a bag of sugar for a weight.

- If you have been advised to, then you can include a basic circuit such as: squats/sit to stand, wall press, shoulder press, rowing, variations of a plank.

Setting goals

- Keep a diary of your goals and make a record of how you are doing (goals should be measurable to assess your progress e.g. measuring 1000 steps, or the distance between two lamp posts and increase the distance gradually). You may find it helpful to buy a small gadget that counts the number of steps you take in a day.
- Consider both short term goals (about one month) and long term (three months) goals to break your progress up into achievable chunks.
- It is important to prepare for setbacks and when these happen it is useful to make a list of the problems that you faced and then ask yourself the question “How will I overcome these?”

TIP: What are your goals for increasing your physical activity…

How will you achieve these goals?

I am ready to be more active and I would like help

City of York residents:

1. Visit: www.york.gov.uk/SportsActivities for information on local exercise facilities in the city of York.
2. Visit: www.livewellyork.co.uk for information on activities and events in your community to help you exercise.

Selby residents:

1. Visit: www.selby.gov.uk/sport-and-wellbeing for details of local leisure and exercise facilities
2. Visit: www.inspiringhealthylifestyles.org/selby

If you have a BMI over 25 you can take part in the free 12 week 'Move It and Lose It' programme. Phone 01942 404 799 for more information.

North Yorkshire residents**:**
Visit: www.northyorks.gov.uk/move-more-exercise-and-fitness for details of local exercise venues.
Visit: www.northyorks.gov.uk/leisure-and-fitness-groups For details of local leisure and fitness groups in your community.

Other useful information
https://central.movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/Patient-workbook.pdf
An option for home online classes
https://homehealthhub.org

5. **Diabetes**



Diabetes can affect your body's ability to heal properly after surgery and make you prone to developing infections. It can also affect your salt levels and kidney function. It is important to have good control of your blood glucose levels before your operation.

The better you control your diabetes the better your chances of a good surgical outcome and the quicker you will recover from the operation.

We recommend a safe blood glucose level between 5 and 9 mmol/L.

Before your operation we will do a HbA1c blood test, to show us how well your diabetes is controlled.

If your levels of blood glucose are high, this significantly increases your risk of developing complications after surgery:

You are prone to developing infections such as:

- Wound infection so your wound will heal slowly.
- Chest infection making it harder for you to breathe.
- It can damage the walls of your arteries, making them more likely to develop fatty deposits. This can reduce the amount of oxygen to your heart and brain and can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

- ✗ hyperglycaemia (high blood glucose) or hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose) can lead to a coma.

If you control your blood glucose before the surgery:

- ✓ Your wound is more likely to heal well and is less likely to break down and become infected.
- ✓ You are more likely to avoid problems with controlling your blood glucose (hyperglycaemia/hypoglycaemia).
- ✓ You are more likely to have a faster recovery and a shorter hospital stay.

I am ready to get better control of my diabetes and I would like help

Your GP

Contact your practice nurse if your glucose level is consistently above the target level. Your practice nurse or your GP will refer you to the diabetes team at the hospital if you need further advice and help.

Diabetes and exercise

Visit:
https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=2412
for more information about how to manage your diabetes as you begin to exercise more.

TIP: Have you read the information on York hospitals website on diabetes and exercise...

What do you think are the key messages?

What steps will you take to help you get better control of your blood glucose?



6. **Alcohol**

Alcohol has many effects on your body including your liver, heart and immune system. The liver makes many different proteins which are important for wound healing and your immunity. It also makes proteins that help control bleeding.

The NHS currently advises men and women not to drink more than 14 units a week

(For example - half pint of normal strength beer is equivalent to one unit. A small glass of wine is one and a half units).

It is important for you to stay within the recommended limits.

If you drink above the recommended limit, you have an increase in your risk of:

- ✗ Bleeding
- ✗ Developing heart and lung problems
- ✗ Complications that can impact on your recovery after your operation.

If you reduce your alcohol intake before surgery:

- ✓ You are less likely to develop complications relating to alcohol withdrawal after surgery.

- ✓ Your body will be able to make the building blocks needed to help fight infection, control bleeding and help your wounds heal.
- ✓ You are likely to have better mental and physical health which will help you recover faster from surgery and have a shorter hospital stay.

I am ready to reduce my alcohol intake and I would like help

Many people are unsure if they are drinking too much and whether they need to take action. There are services and professionals who can help you decide if your drinking is a problem. They can also offer help if you just want to cut down or change your drinking habits.

Online resources

www.drinkaware.co.uk

This site has helpful self-assessment tools, practical tips to cut down on your drinking and advice about how to stay on track.

Visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support

This site has information to help you decide if you are drinking too much. It gives details of the health benefits of reducing your drinking and links to local support services.

Telephone support

Drinkline Phone 0300 123 1110

This a free confidential helpline for people who are worried they, or a family member, are drinking too much.

Your GP

TIP: Work out many units of alcohol you drink a week?

Do you think you need to drink less?

How are you going to achieve this?

You can discuss your drinking behaviour with your GP or practice nurse. They can support you or put you in touch with local support services.

You can also discuss any concerns you might have about withdrawal, or if you feel unwell.

7. **Mental Wellbeing**



It is just as important to have a healthy mind as well as a healthy body.

Surgery is a stressful event and can cause anxiety. Changing your out look as you prepare for surgery can be hard and there will be days when you doubt your progress and feel low. You may find it important to deal with these issues as they arise. To do so you will have to focus on your day to day mental well-being.

Mental wellbeing is on a scale ranging from poor to good and can vary from day to day.

Staying at the healthy end of the scale can help you in a lot of different ways: It can

- ✓ Reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- ✓ Reduce feelings of depression
- ✓ Help you sleep better
- ✓ Help you have better relationships
- ✓ Help you manage your pain better
- ✓ Help you achieve the goals you want to achieve

It is important for your mental wellbeing to be as healthy as possible before your surgery. This will help your recovery.

These five steps can help you improve or maintain your mental wellbeing:

1. Connect with other people
2. Be physically active
3. Learn new skills
4. Give some of your time to others
5. Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

I am ready to improve my mental wellbeing and I would like help

Online resources

Visit: https://www.actionforhappiness.org

This gives you helpful tips on staying calm and general well-being.

Occasionally people feel depressed and their mental wellbeing suffers. There is lots of support available if you are feeling down, stressed or depressed.

Visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression

This site has some tools to help you assess your mood. It gives tips on self-help and support and provides links to other resources.

Your GP

Your GP can help talk through how you are feeling. They can discuss psychological therapies with you or tell you about antidepressant medication.

Psychological therapies

If you are struggling with feelings of stress, anxiety or depression you can refer yourself for 'talking therapies' such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or counselling.

You can find more information at www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/free-therapy-or-counselling

In an emergency:

If you feel like harming yourself or that life is not worth living please seek help straight away

You can

Contact Samaritans on 116 123 for 24 hour confidential support

Call your GP and ask for an emergency appointment

Call 111 out of hours to help you find the support you need nearby

TIP: What can you do to help your mental wellbeing?
What changes can you make to help you?

Changing Your Lifestyle, Habits and Behaviours

If you are reading this booklet then it is likely that you already know that changing your lifestyle is not easy and this can leave you feeling like a failure or low in confidence and self-esteem. These factors then make it more likely that you will try to comfort yourself through eating, smoking or drinking alcohol, and they make it harder to socialise which affects your ability to be active and lose weight.

But you can do it! Whether you want to stop smoking, lose weight, eat more healthily or be more active, everything is possible. There are things you can do to successfully make changes that will make a big difference to your health and get you fitter for surgery.

This section can help you think about how to make these changes.

You may find it helpful to consider these steps

Step 1: Focus on one habit / behaviour you want to change at a time

- Changing habits and a lifestyle you may have had for a lifetime is tough
- Trying to change lots of things is even harder
- Pick one thing to change or improve at a time
- Once you have successfully changed it for at least a few months, considering adding in the next behaviour you want to change.

Step 2: Pick a habit / behaviour that you are ready to change and that you feel you can change

- Consider which goal is most important to you and which habit you are ready to change.
- On a scale of 0-10, How important is changing this habit to you?
- On a scale of 0-10, How confident are you that you can change this behaviour?
- For each of the above questions, why did you pick the number? How can we increase your confidence? What support do you need?

Step 3: Consider what hooks you in to unhelpful behaviours?

- Think about how you feel and what you think in situations that trigger unhelpful behaviours (such as smoking, drinking alcohol, being inactive, overeating etc).
- Notice what “hooks” you in.
- “Hooks” often happen automatically so it takes practice to call them out and give yourself a chance of choosing how to respond to triggers differently (e.g. not overeating, not smoking, not drinking alcohol, not exercising etc).

- Try saying this to yourself when you notice your thoughts/ feelings “hooking” you into mindless unhelpful behaviours (e.g. smoking/ overeating/ drinking alcohol) – “I notice you mind trying to hook me in! I see that I’m feeling stressed/low/frustrated. Today, I choose (e.g. being socially connected to people or self-caring) instead!”

Step 4: Build your awareness

- Do you tend to operate on autopilot throughout the day rather than be mindfully aware?
- It is important to practice checking in with your thoughts and feelings to help you change unhelpful behaviour.
- Try regularly taking a pause (hourly alarm?) and ask yourself: What’s going through my mind right now?
- Notice how I am feeling in this moment?
- What can I see, hear, smell, touch and taste?
- Mindfulness practice apps can help with this such as Headspace, Insight timer or Calm.

This website has a lot of free audio recordings of mindfulness exercises:

http://www.freemindfulness.org/download

Step 5: Clarify your motivation to change your behaviour

- It is important to consider what matters to you when your mind is trying to "hook" you into (smoking/drinking alcohol/being inactive/overeating).

The following questions might help you to do this:

1. Why does health and well-being matter to me?
2. Why is making this change important to me/?
3. What might happen if I don't make this change?

Step 6: Consider how you are going to change?

- How will you get to your goal?
- What will you change about your lifestyle?

Step 7: Build a toolkit to help you make changes.

- Think about the ways that you already know helped you to move towards your desired goals and values.
- The following tools may also help you to add to your toolkit:

Tool 1: “Surf that urge”

- Urges to overeat, smoke, be inactive or drink alcohol can be understood like waves that reach a peak then eventually subside if “surfed”.
- Visualise your urges like waves – notice where they are located in your body, how they move or change…
- Focus on the sensation of your breathing whilst you “surf”
- Stay with the urge to overeat, drink alcohol, smoke or be inactive until it subsides or you can do something more helpful.

Tool 2: Name the feeling underneath the “hook”

- Practice your “soothing” skills to help manage these feelings, i.e. do activities that calm you, e.g. stretching, breathing, drawing, walking etc.

Tool 3: Be kind to yourself

- Making changes is tough and lapses will happen – you are a human being after all!
- Sometimes the conversations in our heads can be self-critical when we have poor control over eating/ exercise/ drinking alcohol/ smoking etc.

- Your job is to work on not getting “hooked in” by self-critical thoughts when the going gets tough. Again connect with activities that soothe you or bring to mind times when you felt calm / were helped/ cared for etc.
- This website has free audio recordings of self-compassion exercises: https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/

Tool 4: Distraction

- Keep tempting foods/ cigarettes/ alcohol out of reach and healthy snacks/ drinks/ nicorette patches ready prepared and in reach.
- Find an enjoyable hobby to distract you and to help you “surf the urge” when you notice thoughts and feelings “hooking” you in and trigger unhelpful behaviours (overeating/ smoking/being inactive / drinking alcohol etc)

Step 8: Share your aims with those around you

- Sharing your goals and values with other people can make it feel real. Tell those closest to you to help provide support and keep you accountable.

Step 9: Make your goals small and realistic. Be patient.

Rome was not built in a day! Small consistent changes are important and over time will make a big difference.

Step 10: Celebrate every success

- Changing long-term behaviours is a challenge. Turn up for yourself when you need it!
- Be your own cheerleader! Celebrate consistency, celebrate the small wins and know you are a step closer to your long-term goals!

TIP:

Ask yourself the following questions:

I'll know things are getting better when…?

What have I tried so far to make that happen?

How has that worked?

What has it cost me?

Does it lead me to the life I want to lead?

If not, what could I try to do things differently?

My progress

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Notes

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Mr S Chintapatla, Consultant Surgeon,
York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 721154.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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