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It pays to quit smoking before surgery

Nicotine replacement therapy can help prevent common complications

Cologne, 3 September 2009. People who start nicotine replacement therapy at least four weeks before surgery can halve their risk of poor wound healing. This is what the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) concludes in information published on informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org>) today.

Quitting smoking in times of stress is not easy

“It is not easy to quit smoking just before an operation,” appreciates Professor Peter Sawicki, the Institute’s Director. “But people who smoke are more likely to have complications after surgery than people who do not smoke,” he adds.

IQWiG has now analysed current research results that show that nicotine replacement therapy can help people quit smoking and avoid complications after surgery. Nicotine replacement therapy helps reduce withdrawal symptoms when people stop smoking by giving them nicotine through a patch or chewing gum. Trials showed that only 14 percent of the patients who smoked had problems with wound healing if they had nicotine replacement therapy at least four weeks before surgery, compared to 28 percent of the patients who did not have nicotine replacement therapy. Poor wound healing is one of the most common complications after surgery.

Lack of oxygen can cause poor wound healing

“Anaesthetics and surgery put a strain on the body’s oxygen supply as it is,” explains Professor Sawicki. “Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen that is available in the blood even more, making it more difficult for wounds to heal – a process which requires oxygen.”

The Institute's website, www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org>) , provides the public with easy-to-understand information about current medical developments and research on important health issues. If you would like to be kept up-to-date with the latest publications on the independent health information website, you can subscribe to the informedhealthonline.org newsletter (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.69.en.html>) .

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Information:

Complications after surgery: Can quitting smoking before surgery reduce the risks? (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.541.en.html>)

Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

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Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

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