

SPINE SURGERY & SMOKING

Tobacco products cause a number of significant problems for patients undergoing spinal fusion surgery including the following:

- Significantly decreases the rate of success of a fusion due to non-union (pseudoarthrosis).
- Smoking affects circulation of blood in the small vessels. Blood carries oxygen and nutrients to cells. This is important because there is little circulation to the shock-absorbing discs that cushion our spine. Smoking further reduces blood flow, meaning blood flow to the discs is less. The same problem affects wound healing after surgery. Smokers have a higher risk of wound problems, including infections.
- In addition to the blood flow issue, nicotine in cigarettes inhibits bone healing. In patients who undergo spinal surgery involving fusion, smoking increases the risk of non-union (pseudoarthrosis).

Philosophically, it is perfectly reasonable for a surgeon to not agree to do a fusion surgery until after a patient has quit smoking. It is reasonable to ensure that the patient is in the best healing position possible prior to proceeding with surgery. The best approach for achieving a successful outcome (e.g. reduced pain) in a spinal fusion patient who smokes is for that person to quit smoking, permanently.

Although we do not require smoking cessation prior to fusion surgery, we make every effort to assist patients in this regard. For patients, who cannot stop smoking, we mitigate risks by using minimally invasive techniques to decrease the likelihood of wound and healing problems.

The best approach for smokers facing spinal fusion is to stop smoking and remain non-smokers. This results in the best outcomes including a solid fusion and other desired outcomes, such as pain reduction.

We aggressively encourage patients to stop smoking at least 8 weeks prior to surgery, particularly any procedure involving spinal fusion, in an effort to enhance their chances for a successful outcome and to minimize their risks related to their lung function. This being said, smoking is the most difficult addiction to fight. Here is a recommended resource that can assist you with quitting:

ASHLINE
Arizona Smokers' Helpline
1-800-556-6222
www.ashline.org

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