Quitting Smoking Won't Increase Surgical Complications

A meta-analysis of nine previous studies found that quitting smoking shortly before surgery was not associated with an increased risk of post-operative complications, according to a report that will appear in the July 11 print issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*, one of the JAMA/Archives journals.

"Cigarette smoking has been implicated as a risk factor for post-operative complications across a spectrum of surgical specialties," the authors provide as background information. "Compared with non-smokers, smokers who undergo surgery have longer hospital stays, higher risk of readmission, are more likely to be admitted to an intensive care unit, and have an increased risk of in-hospital mortality." They add that existing data do not provide clear advice on an optimal period for a patient to quit smoking before a surgical procedure.

To determine whether there is any evidence that stopping smoking within eight weeks before surgery is associated with post-operative complications, Katie Myers, M.Sc., C.Psychol., and colleagues from Queen Mary University of London, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, analyzed existing studies through a search of medical literature. They found nine studies that met their inclusion criteria comparing post-operative complications in patients who stopped smoking eight weeks or less prior to surgery with those who continued to smoke.

"Only one of the nine included studies reported a significant result, and this was in favor of recent abstainers. When all nine studies are combined, there is no beneficial or detrimental effect of quitting within eight weeks before surgery compared with continued smoking," the authors report. However, they stress the findings need to be interpreted with caution. "Future studies should focus on patients with a very short duration of abstinence and should use biochemical validation of self-reported abstinence. In the meantime, until some new evidence of harm emerges, firm advice to stop smoking and an offer of smoking cessation treatment to those who need it can be provided to pre-surgical patients at any time," the authors conclude.

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