

Ready, Set, Surgery

Prehabilitation Handbook



PREHAB

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Introduction

This handbook is to support Albertans preparing for surgery. This information is general and may or may not apply to you. If you have questions about the information and advice in this resource, talk to your primary healthcare provider.

How to use this handbook

Your prehab program is made for you. It's based on your health, needs, and goals. You have an important role in preparing for your surgery and this handbook will help you understand prehab and help you set your goals. It has checklists, tips, and places to write your goals.

You can share this handbook with your caregiver, care partner, or anyone supporting you. We offer consultations, webinars, and resources to help meet your goals. Contact our team if you need help getting started or choosing which options might be best for you.

What is prehab?

Prehab is the process of preparing your mind and body for surgery. Having an operation puts stress on your body. Prehab helps prepare you to cope with this stress, to help you:

- Feel stronger in mind and body.
- Reduce feelings of stress and worry.
- Lower your risk of surgical complications.
- Heal and recover more quickly.
- Spend less time in hospital.
- Get back to what matters most in your life sooner.

What can I do to prepare for surgery and improve my recovery?

Many factors can affect how you respond to surgery. Some are out of your control, while others can be made better before your surgery. Prehab focuses on four health and lifestyle factors:



Feeling Ready

Managing stress and daily routines before and after surgery.



Being Active

Moving more, building strength, and participating in activities you enjoy.



Eating Well

Knowing what foods will help your body prepare and recover.



Living Well

Developing habits to improve health and wellbeing.

Feeling Ready

It is common to have anxiety about having surgery. You may feel anxious or have stress at different times, for different reasons. When you take an active role in preparing for surgery and getting the support you need, it can help you feel in control and reduce feelings of stress and worry.

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Feeling ready for surgery means being prepared and feeling supported.

Being prepared and feeling supported

There are different ways to prepare and feel supported. To begin, here are some ideas that may help:

- Learn about your surgery and what to expect.
- Identify and tell others your support needs.
- Explore strategies to manage your stress.

Learn about your surgery and what to expect

Before your surgery, you will be given specific instructions about how to prepare. This lets you know what to expect. You might receive this information at your:

- First appointment
- Follow-up appointment with your surgeon, or
- Pre-admission clinic appointment before your surgery.



Read all the information you are given about your surgery. Include your family, friends, and your support person. Include those who will help you during recovery after surgery. Your support person will also need to know and understand the information you are given.

It is common to not know what questions to ask your healthcare team. Below are some example questions to ask about your surgery that may help:

- What is the name of the surgery?
- Why do I need surgery?
- What are the risks and benefits?
- What results should I expect?
- Where will the surgery be done?
- How long will I need to stay in the hospital after surgery?
- What do I need to do before to prepare?
- How long will it take to recover after?
- What activities should I avoid, limit, or stop doing after surgery? For how long?
- What symptoms should I watch for and report after surgery?
- Who do I contact if I am worried about my recovery?

What questions do you have? Write them down below:

Identify and communicate your support needs

It is common to need support while you prepare for and recover from surgery. Solid support can help you feel and cope better before and after surgery. Your social support system may include family, friends, co-workers, community groups, or government programs. Use the list below to help you identify the support you need. Check the boxes that apply to you.

Common supports:

- Recording information and taking notes during medical appointments.
- Understanding information about your surgery and recovery.
- Getting to and from the hospital and to appointments after surgery.
- A place to stay if you must leave your community for surgery.
- A person to stay with you, if you live alone.
- Getting your home ready for recovery.
- Getting the medical supplies and equipment you need at home for after surgery.
- Preparing meals, grocery shopping, completing household tasks, and daily responsibilities.
- Participating in activities you enjoy.
- Coping and dealing with feelings and worries about your surgery.

What other supports do you need? Write your ideas below:



Getting help and finding support can be hard. Here are some tips to try:

- Explore resources in your community, such as community centres, seniors’ organizations, libraries and faith communities.
- Ask your healthcare team for help if you can’t find the supports you need.
- Make a list of the people and resources in your community that can help.
- Create a plan that includes a variety of supports.
- When you feel hesitant to ask for help, remember that the people who care about you often appreciate the chance to help.

Explore strategies to manage stress

Managing your stress is important for your wellbeing, especially before surgery. Try different strategies to find what works for you.

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Managing stress can help your body heal faster and enhance your recovery.

Stress management strategies to try:

Strategy	Example
Engage in self-care to help your body better handle stress.	Get enough sleep, be physically active, and get enough nutrition.
Practice deep breathing exercises to help your body relax. Try to do these a few times daily.	Breathe in for 4 seconds. Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Breathe out for 6 seconds. Adjust timing as needed.
Do what brings you comfort or joy. This can help boost your mood and give your mind a break from worrying.	Have a cup of tea, visit a friend, listen to music, or do a hobby.
Address sources of stress directly. Identify what is causing you concern and take steps to manage it.	Ask your healthcare team questions about your surgery, ask for help from friends or family, communicate what you need to others, and accept help when offered.
Change thinking patterns. When you notice a negative thought, consider how you can reframe it to be more helpful.	If you’re thinking, “something might go wrong,” try to reframe it. “I am in good hands, and I can focus on what I can control to support my healing.”

What stress management strategies would you like to try? Write them below:

Being Active

There are many benefits to being active before surgery.

Physical activity:

- Boosts your energy and lowers pain. This allows you to move your body more with less pain.
- Trains your body to handle the stress of surgery. Healing after surgery places extra demands on your body. Being active before surgery helps prepare your body for this extra stress or strain.
- Lowers your risk of complications from surgery. Being active supports your immune system and your body's ability to heal. This helps lower your risk of complications like infections.
- Decreases how long you need to stay in hospital after surgery. It can help you recover faster from surgery, which helps you get home sooner.

Types of activity to try

To improve your health, the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guideline recommends:



Aerobic exercise

- Walking, swimming, biking, or dancing.
- At least 150 minutes weekly.



Strength training

- Push-ups, squats, or chores that include heavy lifting.
- At least 2–3 times weekly.



Balance and flexibility

- Yoga, Tai Chi, or standing on one foot.
- At least 2 times weekly.

You can build-up to these weekly activity goals while getting the health benefits from them. Try to get 7-8 hours of good quality sleep each night and be sedentary (sit or be still) fewer than 8 hours daily.

Being active when you have pain

Most people are safe to be active, even if they have pain. Being active can increase your body's natural pain relief response and lower your sensitivity to pain.



What to be aware of during activity

During physical activity or exercise, if you have any of the following symptoms, **stop** what you are doing. **Go to your nearest emergency room or call 911.**

- Feel dizzy, light-headed, or lose consciousness (pass out)
- Have chest pain
- Feel nauseous (sick to your stomach) or vomit (throw up)
- Have shortness of breath that does not get better with rest
- Have a fast heart rate that does not lower with rest
- Have sharp or severe pain

Training your lungs for surgery

During surgery, most people will have a breathing tube put in. A breathing tube goes from your mouth into your lungs to help you breathe during anesthesia.

Although necessary, the breathing tube and laying down during and after surgery, increases your risk of complications. Training your lungs through exercise and physical activity helps to reduce complications caused by these factors.

Breathing exercise to help train your lungs for surgery

Pursed lip breathing

This activity brings more air into your lungs. This helps reduce difficulty breathing. It also improves your lungs' ability to use oxygen. To do this activity:

1. Breathe in (inhale) slowly through your nose like you are sniffing flowers. Then purse your lips like you are blowing out candles.
2. Breath out (exhale) through your mouth. Keep your lips pursed.

Try to build up to do this activity for 10 repetitions (repeat steps 1 and 2) 2–3 times daily.

Diaphragmatic breathing

This activity makes your breathing muscle (the diaphragm) stronger. It helps to lower complications after surgery. To do this activity:

1. Place one hand on your stomach.
2. Breathe in (inhale). Feel your stomach push out as the air fills your lungs.
3. Breathe out (exhale) through your mouth. Feel your stomach flatten as the air leaves your lungs.

Try to build up to do this activity for 10 repetitions (repeat steps 1, 2 and 3) 2–3 times daily.

Mucus clearing

These activities loosen mucus in your lungs so that you can cough it out. This prevents breathing difficulties and infections like pneumonia. Try these activities if you feel you have mucus in your lungs, are coughing up mucus, or have a wet-sounding cough. To do these activities:

1. Huff - Breathe out (exhale) forcefully, like you are trying to fog up a mirror with your breath.
2. Supported Coughing - Put gentle pressure on your stomach as you cough. Use your hands, a pillow, or a seatbelt.

.....
 In Canada, falls cause
 1 in 3 trauma-related
 trips to the emergency
 room.

Fall risk and prevention

It is important to prevent falls before and after surgery. This helps you avoid injury, recover faster, and keep active.

Common fall-related risk factors:

Health	Physical	Environmental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take 5 or more medications • Change in blood pressure • Use of drugs or alcohol • Poor sleep • Poor nutrition • Have stress or low mood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor balance • Low muscle strength • Have pain • Poor vision • Fear of falling • Move around too quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tripping hazards at home • Tripping hazards outside • Doing hobbies and activities

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk is of having a fall.

To prevent falls

Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review your health conditions with your primary care provider. • Review your medications with your primary care provider and pharmacist. • Have an annual eye exam.
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more physically active. • Try aerobic, strength training, balance and flexibility activities.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a cane or walker for safety. • Consider using a brace or splint to increase support. • Wear shoes and clothes that fit well. Avoid wearing loose slippers. • Consider a personal alert system or fall detection device.

Prepare your home for recovery

Getting your home ready before you have surgery can help prevent injuries after. The checklist below can help you prepare your home to help you recover safely.

Bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/> My bed comes up 2–4 inches above my knee when standing. <input type="checkbox"/> I have a clear path from my bed to the bathroom.
Bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a plan for how I will shower or bathe. <input type="checkbox"/> I have a non-slip bathmat and a shower wand.
Kitchen	<input type="checkbox"/> The kitchen items I use most are easily within my reach. <input type="checkbox"/> I have a dining room chair with armrests.
Stairs	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a sturdy railing on my stairs.
General	<input type="checkbox"/> I have removed loose rugs and clutter from my home. <input type="checkbox"/> I have enough space to move around with a walker or crutches.

Eating Well

Your body needs enough nutrition to get ready for surgery. Eating well can give your body the nutrients it needs to get stronger to help you recover more quickly.

The amount of nutrition your body needs changes due to age or life situation, like surgery. You may need to follow a specific diet due to a medical condition or treatment which affects how your body uses nutrients.

If you have symptoms that affect your ability to eat well, like a poor appetite or difficulty chewing or swallowing, you may need to use strategies to help you eat well.

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Eating a balanced diet has many benefits for before and after surgery.

Benefits of getting enough nutrition

Eating a balanced diet can help you:

- Feel stronger and have more energy.
- Lower your risk of complications after surgery, including infection.
- Prevent falls.
- Go home sooner after surgery.



If you have diabetes, heart, kidney, or liver disease, ask a dietitian for help with your diet. Your nutrition needs may be very different than what is advised in this section of the handbook.

Important nutrients for prehab

For prehab, your food choices need to give you enough protein, iron, omega-3 fats, vitamins, minerals, and fluids.

Consider keeping a food diary to help you track what you eat, drink, and any supplements you take. This can help you see if you are eating a balanced diet.

Protein

Protein is a nutrient that has many roles in your body. It is needed to build stronger muscles along with physical activity and exercise. It also helps you build a stronger immune system to prevent or fight off infection.

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Try to have protein foods 4 times daily at meals and snacks, each with 25–30 grams of protein.

Food sources of protein

Protein is found in both animal- and plant-based foods.

Try to eat a variety of protein foods to help you get the different vitamins, minerals, and fibre that some protein foods also have.

Protein source	Protein food	Serving size	Amount of protein
Animal-based	Beef or pork	2.5 oz or 75 grams	21-28 grams
	Chicken or turkey	2.5 oz (75 grams)	17-22 grams
	Egg, whole	2 each, large	12 grams
	Fish	2.5 oz (75 grams)	11-19 grams
	Cheese, hard	1.5 oz (50 grams)	9-15 grams
	Cottage cheese	1 cup (250 mL)	28-30 grams
	Milk	1 cup (250 mL)	9 grams
	Greek yogurt	¾ cup (175 mL)	14-18 grams
Plant-based	Beans, peas, lentils	¾ cup (175 mL)	9-13 grams
	Nuts or seeds	¼ cup (60 mL)	5-8 grams
	Tofu	¾ cup (175 mL)	10-17 grams
	Fortified soy beverage	1 cup (250 mL)	7 grams
	Hemp hearts	¼ cup (60 mL)	13 grams
Protein supplement	Protein drink	1 cup (250 mL)	9-30 grams
	Protein powder	2 Tbsp (30 mL)	10-12 grams
	Protein bar	1 bar (50-80 grams)	10-20 grams

Protein supplements

If you are in a rush or have a low appetite, a protein supplement can help you reach your daily protein goal. Look for a supplement with at least 10 grams of protein per serving.

Iron

Iron is a mineral that is needed by your blood to carry oxygen around your body. If you don't get enough iron, you may feel tired and be less able to fight infections.

Food sources of iron

- beef, bison, elk
- chicken, duck, turkey
- egg yolk
- fish, shellfish
- goat, lamb
- pork, wild boar
- beans, lentils, chickpeas
- fortified grains and flours
- tofu, edamame

Omega-3 fats

Omega-3 fats help your body to:

- prevent blood clots
- lower your blood pressure
- reduce inflammation and swelling

Sources of omega-3 fats include:

- Arctic char
- chia and flaxseeds, hemp hearts
- kelp
- herring
- mackerel
- oils, canola and soybean
- salmon
- sardines
- seaweed (wakame)
- trout tempeh, tofu
- walnuts

All fish have omega-3 fats, but fatty fish have the highest amounts.

Vitamins and minerals

A balanced diet is one that also has enough vitamins and minerals your body needs. However, a daily multivitamin can help you make sure you get what you need before surgery.

Look for a supplement with iron, selenium, vitamin A, vitamin C, and zinc. Talk to your primary care provider or pharmacist before taking supplements.



If you are trying to lose weight before surgery, talk to a dietitian first. Losing weight too fast can impact your muscle, strength, and nutrition. A dietitian can help you create a healthy weight loss plan that supports your goals.

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Good quality protein supplements are made from whey, casein, soy, or a mix of plant-based proteins.

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Omega-3 fats are important to get from food because our bodies cannot make them

Fluid

Drinking enough fluids daily helps to:

- Keep your body hydrated.
- Prevent constipation.
- Keep your skin healthy.
- Regulate body temperature.

Water is the preferred source of fluid. Other fluids include milk, fortified soy beverage, coffee, tea, soup, and broth.

How much fluid do I need?

- Adults: 9–12 cups (2.25–3 L) of fluid total each daily.
- Older adults: 6–8 cups (1.5–2 L) of fluid total each daily.

What can you do to get more nutrition to get ready for surgery? Write your ideas below.

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Drink more fluids
when you're active or
when it is hot outside.



Living Well

When you take steps to improve your health before surgery, it can help you recover after surgery. Even taking small steps can make a big difference in your recovery.

Smoking tobacco

Reducing or stopping smoking tobacco before surgery has many health benefits during and after surgery.

These include:

- Improved wound healing.
- Lower risk of blood clots.
- Clearer airways in your lungs.
- Lower risk of infection.

With each week and month that you are tobacco-free before surgery, you can improve your recovery time and lower your risk of complications.

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Quitting smoking is
hard, but you're not
alone. AlbertaQuits
helpline is free,
confidential, and has
translation services
available. Call:
1-866-710-7848

Alcohol



It is recommended not to drink alcohol at least 24 hours before surgery. This is to prevent complications with anesthesia and risk of excess bleeding during surgery.

Limiting alcohol use can also improve your recovery after surgery. Benefits to limiting alcohol before surgery includes lowering your risk of:

- Infection.
- Medication side effects.
- Bleeding and the need to receive donor blood (transfusion).
- Developing delirium (confusion) after surgery.

To help manage how much alcohol you drink, set a weekly goal to drink less and stick to the limit you set. If you decide to drink alcohol, limit it to 2 drinks daily.

If you regularly drink alcohol, talk to your primary care provider before stopping as you could experience withdrawal symptoms.

Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea is when your breathing stops for short periods while you sleep. People who have sleep apnea often don't feel rested after a full night's sleep.

Symptoms of sleep apnea

- Waking up with a sore or dry throat.
- Waking up with a headache.
- Snoring, gasping, choking, or holding your breath while sleeping.

People with unmanaged sleep apnea are at a higher risk of complications during surgery. Complications include sensitivity to medications, heart and lung issues, and confusion.

If you suspect you have sleep apnea, talk to your primary care provider. Early screening and detection can help you prepare for surgery. If you have sleep apnea, tell your healthcare team before surgery.

Tips for if you have sleep apnea:

- Make sure your breathing machine (CPAP or BiPAP) mask fits properly. Ensure the machine is at the right setting for you.
- Rent or buy a CPAP or BiPAP if it is recommended to you.
- Use your CPAP or BiPAP every night and during naps.
- Bring your CPAP or BiPAP to the hospital on the day of your surgery to use while in hospital.

Blood sugar levels

Blood sugar is a phrase to describe the amount of sugar in your blood at a given time.

Before surgery, it is important to have your blood sugar levels consistently within your ideal range. An ideal range is where your body functions best. Good blood sugar control helps to lower your risk of health complications.

Two main benefits of good blood sugar control include improved wound healing and lower risk of infection. Eating well, being active, and taking medications as prescribed (if necessary) will help keep your blood sugar levels within their ideal range.

Steps to take to help manage your blood sugar levels:

- Review your blood sugar care plan. Check-in with your primary care provider to review your current management plan.
- Bring a support person to appointments. They can ask questions, take notes, or offer emotional support.
- Share concerns with your primary care provider. This includes getting diabetes-care supplies.
- Expect more testing before surgery to ensure your blood sugar levels are within range.

Blood pressure

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard your blood pushes against the walls of your blood vessels. Blood pressure changes during the day and with different activities. Unmanaged blood pressure may affect your surgery date and increase your risk of complications during and after surgery.

- **If it is too low**, you may not get enough blood flow and oxygen to your organs during surgery.
- **If it is too high**, you may have a higher risk of complications like heart attack, stroke, or kidney problems.

Eating well, being physically active, managing your stress, taking medications as prescribed, quitting smoking, and limiting alcohol are steps that you can take to manage your blood pressure.

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Ideal range for most adults is 4–7 mmol/L.
Talk to your primary care provider for what is best for you.

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Ideal blood pressure for most adults is 120/80.
Talk to your primary care provider for what is the best range for you.

Prevent confusion or delirium

Delirium is when you are suddenly confused. It can come and go throughout the day and may change how you think, act, or understand. It can slow or impair your recovery from surgery and require you to stay longer in the hospital after surgery. For some people, delirium is preventable.

Tips to try to reduce your risk of delirium:

- **Move your body and form a routine.** Being active and getting back to a routine after surgery can help prevent confusion. Start being active before surgery to make going back to it easier after surgery.
- **Exercise your mind.** Try new activities to challenge your brain, like sudoku or crossword puzzles, solitaire, or chess. Bring activities you enjoy with you to the hospital.
- **Develop good sleep habits.** Be physically active during the day to have a better sleep at night. Consider using a sleep mask and ear plugs to help reduce light and noise.
- **Talk about changes with your primary care provider or surgery team.** It's important for you and your family to tell your care team about changes in your thinking, personality, and behaviour.
- **Bring vision and hearing aids with you.** If you wear glasses or hearing aids, bring them with you to the hospital. This will help orient you after surgery.
- **Take notes.** Use a calendar and lists to help keep track of dates, names, conversations, questions, appointments, and tasks.

Manage pain from surgery

Pain is a complex process where signals are sent between your body and mind. Everyone experiences pain differently, even with the same injury or surgery.

An important step before surgery is to talk to your healthcare team about pain. Write on the list below and share this with your healthcare or surgery team.

- Medical history _____
- Current medications _____
- Allergies _____
- Pain history _____
- Expectations for after surgery _____
- Pain management options _____
- Pain concerns _____
- Other _____

Talk to your healthcare or surgery team about what works best for you to manage your pain. Bring this list with you to the hospital. This can include medication or other pain management options, like ice, heat, deep breathing, or movement.

Write your ideas below:

How do I start my prehab journey?

To get started:

- **Choose** the areas of prehab that are most important to you.
- **Write down your goals** for the areas of prehab that apply to you.
- **Make a plan** to start preparing your body and mind for surgery.

What you choose to focus on will depend on your specific health concerns, needs, goals, and surgery.

Where can I go for help with my prehab program?

You can call us to book an appointment with one of our prehab team members. We can help you plan a prehab program that is right for you.

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To book an appointment, call us at 1-888-852-3383

How can I stay motivated to prepare for surgery?

Staying motivated with making health changes before surgery can be hard. As you start your prehab program, it may be helpful to ask yourself:

- Why do I want to prepare my mind and body for surgery?
- How can preparing for surgery address what matters most to me?

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Exploring what is important to you can help with motivation and help connect you to why this hard work is worth it



During times you are struggling with motivation, it may be helpful to imagine the best possible outcome and how achieving your prehab goals will positively impact you.

Tips for creating your prehab goals

- **Start with one small goal.** Focus on one change at a time. Small changes add up over time.
- **Be specific.** Choose a specific action or behaviour that you are 90% sure you can work on.
- **Pick a ‘do instead’ goal.** ‘Do instead’ goals focus on positive actions. Instead of saying, “I won’t sit all evening,” try saying, “I will walk around my living room every 30 minutes.”
- **Find support.** Research shows that when people have support, they are more likely to stick with and maintain their goals.
- **Be kind to yourself and avoid comparisons.** Comparing yourself to others can fuel feelings of discouragement. Research shows that when people are kind to themselves, they are more likely to maintain health changes.
- **Plan for barriers.** Think about possible barriers and solutions for them ahead of time. This will help you stay on track.
- **Track your progress.** Keep a journal or diary, use an app on your smartphone, or write down your progress on a calendar. This can help you see how far you have come with your goal.
- **Celebrate successes.** Notice and celebrate little and big successes. This can help keep you motivated.

For each area of prehab that applies to you, write a specific goal or goals you want to work on. Here is an example of a Feeling Ready goal: “I will practice deep breathing for 5 minutes every night before bed for the next 2 weeks to help manage my stress before surgery.”



Feeling Ready



Being Active



Eating Well



Living Well

Need help with getting more prehab materials?

If you don't have the tools you need to print information, access the internet, watch prehab videos, or attend prehab sessions, here are a few ideas that might help you get started:

- Talk to your healthcare team about what you need to participate in prehab.
- Ask a family member, friend, neighbor, or someone you trust for help.
- Visit your local library or community centre. They may have the tools you need to access resources online, print information, watch videos, or attend virtual prehab sessions.

If you have more questions or need help to participate in the prehabilitation program, contact us by phone or email.

Call: **1-888-852-3383** or Email: prehab@ahs.ca