MISTAKES WHEN HAVING ANOPERATION

Having a surgical procedure is a big deal whether you are planning on staying for an hour, a day, or over a few nights.

Many people realise with horror, as they walk through the doors, that they are not prepared, with surgery a matter of hours away.

But it is too late at that point!

That procedure may be 'major' or 'minor' – for most people it is all the same – major. And it is usually accompanied by fear and anxiety.

Whether the procedure is in a hospital, consultants rooms, surgical centre, dental rooms or day stay facilities, it is still worth being prepared for.

So what are the 5 biggest mistakes that people make when they have surgery?

1. STRESS

If you arrive sliding into the hospital entrance, out of breath from making sure everyone and everything is under control, that your 'to do list' is nearly ticked off, you will be feeling **STRESSED!**

From making lists for the kids, to who will feed the pets, pick up the mail, arranging your 'away from my desk' auto reply, topping up the mobile, planning meals. That 'to do' list that seemed to grow in length.

Your body is going to have stress hormones, stress thoughts and stress feelings swirling through it.

In this state your heart rate is higher, your blood pressure is higher, your mind is racing and you are in a survival state of fight or flight.

Stress delays healing and contributes to complications down the line.

Stress suppresses your immunity too – wouldn't it be useful to have your immunity supporting you so that you don't pick up a random infection during your hospital stay, or even after you get home?

A body experiencing stress is a body ripe for complications and **not** in the right state to repair and heal. It affects your Nervous System. For the right healing state, the body and mind (the whole of you) need to be in a state of rest and repose.

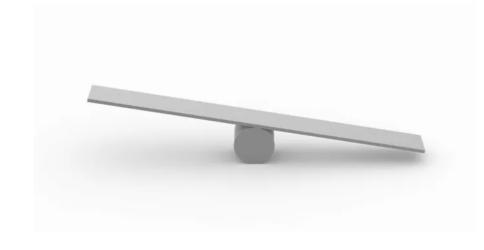
Think about rest and repose being at the other end of the balance to fight and flight – the state of stress.

You may not think of yourself as stressed!

The modern ways that we are living in has sneakily driven up the baseline at which we recognise that we are stressed. This means that we are making the stress hormones all of the time – cortisol is the big one.

But we don't realise the effect of the increased internal levels of stress that we are operating at, and how it is affecting the health of our body and mind. From increased heart rate and blood pressure to headaches, wild thinking and the jitters.

Planning ahead for your surgery and putting steps and strategies into place for mental and emotional resilience will make an enormous difference to how rapidly and easily you recover so that you can get back to your family, work or commitments.



2. IGNORING FEARS AND PHOBIAS

You may know that you are scared of needles/hospital smells/white coats/pain/anaesthetic/enclosed spaces/immobility..... the list goes on.

Yet you bravely face them with your heart beating faster and faster, your mind making up stories while your hands and knees are shaking like leaves. 'She'll be right' is your mantra.

But being brave like this is dropping you into a strong state of stress.

What most people don't know is that these fears can be dealt with effectively and once and for all. There is no need to feel those fears and quite frankly facing them head on doesn't cure you of them either.

There are wonderful techniques that take the phobia away.

Crippling emotion of a previous experience or trauma made more manageable.

And of course, knowing that you have dealt to those fears and past traumas will leave you feeling more confident and in control as you go into surgery.

Learning and practising strategies to use when you encounter, for example, pain is very useful. Knowing that you can breathe, visualise and use other techniques to minimise your discomfort is comforting in itself! Having these to use at will is part of making you stronger as you head into the procedure.

Feeling more in control.

This means your body will not be feeling so stressed – see (1)!

3. THINKING YOU HAVE NO CONTROL.

Did you know that you are part of your own surgical team?

You have an active role in the preparation, process and recovery of your surgery!

There is the team of surgeons, specialists, consultants, anaesthetists, nurses, admin staff, and your own personal support team, and they are all around you – supporting your journey. Individually doing the best with what they know to help you get to where you want to be with your health.

You may have instructions to follow, like.....
* disclosing your current medication and supplement intake (some herbs and supplements can interfere with bleeding – garlic being one of them)

- * reducing certain medication in the days beforehand
- * stop smoking for a week beforehand, using the nicotine patches or coaching. The sooner the better as your lung function and wound healing capacity will start to improve immediately

*eat great nutrition for the weeks leading up to the operation

*get good sleep in the preceding weeks

- * nil food the night before or the morning of
- * not shaving your legs (avoiding micro nicks in your skin for infection to get in)
 - * get some exercise if you have a regime, stick to that, otherwise do more gentle walking to help your body be strong

* **not** getting your nails painted (yes, that is important).

It is a good idea to follow these instructions as they have all been developed through experience.

All of those instructions have been proven to make a difference to the requirements of the operation and are well worth following.

Yet you are the boss of the show.

So if you don't understand something or feel uncomfortable, you are absolutely allowed to ask as often as you like, in order to understand.

And you are also allowed to express specific wishes and needs which you feel will make a difference to the healing journey of you.

You have a right to ask:

* that the 'banter' in the operating theatre is of a positive aspect

- * that certain music that relaxes you is played into your head phones as you are under the anaesthetic
 - * that the anaesthetist makes 'hypnotic suggestions' as you are going under like 'you will be able to heal very well with less pain that will be easily managed.'

*that you can manage your own pain relief

If you know your goal or outcome, you will be able to communicate that to your team. The way that you communicate this is key to whether you empower your team.

Plan for it. Be clear on it. Practise it.

Find out more - contact me now! contact@paularalph.com

Be empowered to lead the way to your own recovery as you take your appropriate place on the surgical team.

If you want to feel ready

If you want to heal faster

If you want to get back to your family and work faster

Contact me now to see how you can start to feel more confident, trusting and prepared for your operation.

contact@paularalph.com

087 398 6578 in Ireland

Otherwise, read on.....

4. **NEGATIVE THINKING.**

Energy flows where attention goes.

If you have in your mind's eye a video running of you requiring medical emergency attention, being in great pain, spending weeks/months/years in recovery if at all, worried about your job, etc, guess what?

With thoughts like these you greatly increase your chances of succeeding – succeeding in needing, more medical assistance, more pain relief and spending more money to heal over a longer time, just like the video in your mind's eye.

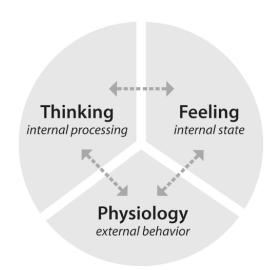
All successful people create goals. This is an 'outcome' and it applies to what you want in life and what you want in health and healing too.

We show ourselves our 'outcome' by having an imaginary story and video running on a loop in our heads. So if that imaginary story is currently not very useful to you, it is time to change the story, creating an new image or a video that is more realistic, comfortable and positive.

You see, your body knows what it needs to do – remember how once upon a time your finger magically healed after it got a cut? You just assumed it would and let the finger, skin, and mysteries underneath the skin get on and do the job of healing. The key here is the unassuming faith of healing – there was no interference of thought or too much physical interference, simply encouragement and possibly an element of wonder.

What we learn to do as we advance in our years and gather more information, is to start to look for bad, if not catastrophic outcomes. The cells in our body are listening in all of the time. They are trying to follow instruction, but, remember **stress** (1)?

Stress from catastrophic or fatalistic thinking promotes more stress and that is not conducive to great healing.



The Cybernetic Loop

Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) is the influence of our feeling (emotion), thinking, and our physiology (health) and how they all influence each other.

That means that emotion like stress, anger, frustration, love, joy etc and our thinking can actually influence the way our body behaves.

Think of a time when you felt in pain. It is likely that you felt alone, sad, frustrated or upset and everything seemed to go more wrong than right. Remember the type of 'story' or images you ran through your mind. Feel how it showed in your body - likely to be hunched over (or not so upright and spritely), breathing more shallow and high in the chest with shoulders forward, and maybe looking down at the ground more. Your face may have a frown or grimace even.

Now think of a time when you were feeling on top of the world - you were physically feeling and looking stronger, you had more positive thinking and stories in your head (even the sun seemed warmer and the sky more blue), you looked upwards more and your shoulders were back, giving your more space to breathe deeply and fully.

According to the above Cybernetic Loop, which is influencing which? The feelings, the thoughts or the physical posture and pain?

That is right!

They all have an opportunity to influence each other and it is difficult to understand which started the loop of communication.

PNI has found that people with a positive outlook have a higher quality of life compared to those with low levels of optimism or even pessimists.

Positive emotions significantly influence mental and physical well-being.

And as the word *Psychoneuroimmunology* suggests immunity is strongly influenced by the 'mood' in which you present.

You know how things seem to go from bad to worse on those 'bad hair' days, well inside your body your immunity takes a knock back as well with more aches and pains seemingly present. And as your immunity has the job of keeping bugs and infection away, then if that is negatively affected, the chances of having an opportunistic infection take hold while your defences are down are greatly enhanced.

Catching and being aware of your thoughts and emotion is key for your rapid healing and recovery.

Sometimes we can easily identify a 'less than useful thought' as we listen to the language we use and it usually starts with: 'I don't want'. That is like being chased by a tiger – how stressful! (And guess what your immune system is doing as well - that's right it is 'in hiding').

What if you turned that around to: 'I want'. That is like chasing the butterflies. Your body feels lighter and more capable and starts to relax into the right state for healing and keep your defences whole.

5. BEING UNREASONABLE WITH YOURSELF

So the surgery is done and you are able to go home to vacuum, cook, clean, get back to work, run the pets to the vets, take your mother to the doctor, visit the supermarket on the way home, cut the kids hair, attend your networking events.....

Self care means care of yourself. You have just had surgery! That has taken an enormous amount of mental and emotional energy, not to mention the effects of medication and anaesthetics.

Doctors say that what you do after the surgery is often just as important as beforehand.

1. LINE UP SOME HELP AT HOME

Rally around a support team, be they to assist you with help for you physical needs, or help with needs around the home. Sometimes organising someone to employ for jobs like mowing the lawns or walking the dog is useful.

If you have children let them feel grown up by caring for you instead. Ask them how they would like to help out.

Does furniture need rearranging to make easier bathroom access, maybe a declutter or special equipment installed?

Do you need somebody to drive you to the place of surgery, or home again? Would you rather a taxi?

Do you feel comfortable asking for help?

2. F00D

Eating food that is nutritional will give your body the right nutrients, vitamins and minerals to put into your healing at the physical level. You help to put your body into a stronger state.

And if you feel good physically, you will feel good mentally and emotionally, (remember PNI?) there will be less chance of complications.

Even the food that you take into your body in the few weeks leading up to the operation can affect your recovery, for good or ill.

Repair of your body needs a lot of energy, so by increasing the quality of your nutrition, you will be doing yourself a big favour. 'Bad food' is like putting stress into your body as it tries to digest it. Feeling sluggish after eating is a sign that what you have just had, may not be positive for your system.

Vegetables, nuts and seeds are always welcome in a digestive system as they provide valuable fibre, vitamins and minerals. Taken in the form of smoothies or stir frys, they can easily become enjoyable and give your great nutrition. And remember that colourful vegetables are really good for you, especially those green ones!

And there are also foods to reduce consumption of being sugary foods and drinks, highly refined carbohydrate rich food - pastries, biscuits etc, fried food and processed food. All of these are more difficult to digest and of low quality nutritionally. You want your energy directed to strength and available for healing.

Stock up your pantry and fridge with good food, before you have the surgery. Maybe precook and freeze meals or make use of apps that put friends on a 'roster' for meal provision.

Your first bowel movement following an operation is an important 'occasion' that allows you to be released home, after a general anaesthetic.

Constipation after surgery is usually a combination of factors including pain medication, anaesthesia, the stress of surgery, inactivity, and dehydration. (It is shown to be the cause of an extra 1.6 days in hospital)

Having a well working elimination system as you prepare for surgery will give you a greater chance of having that system return quickly afterwards.

You can take an active role in preventing or treating your constipation by drinking fluids and eating a healthy diet rich in fibre leading up to and right after surgery.

There are also techniques that can assist the bowels, from massage to visualisations.

Of course part of 'self care' means that you are not a slave in the kitchen and a take away delivered may take the pressure off. Go to the effort of picking something that is worth eating. Of course choosing a treat is not off limits, but don't overdose on these treats!

3. PROBIOTICS

We have a community of good bugs (microbiome) in our gut that is a powerhouse in the area of health and wellness. These bugs are key players in the production of hormones and chemicals that our body needs as well as immunity - protection from the bad bugs.

Keeping the diet healthy will assist this microbiome to stay in peak condition. Taking a probiotic supplement will help this even more!

4. WATER

Drink plenty of water in the few days before the operation. Dehydration doesn't help your body be at it's best physiological level.

A lack of water in your body puts stress on your muscles and tissues, and is a major component of blood. It is a vital ingredient of the requirements for healing. It is vital for your elimination system being important to the consistency of the waste from the bowel.

Water is crucial in wound healing where the requirements for great wound healing actually increase.

Dehydration can make pain and inflammation worse.

Start your increased water intake in the days before the operation (not waiting for the morning of!). You will need to pee more frequently but this settles down after a few days, as your body and bladder adjust to the better levels of hydration.

Caffeine is a diuretic so the thinking that you are still getting water in your cup of coffee won't work. (A diuretic is something that makes you pee the water OUT).

Remember that caffeine is in tea and coffee and that a decaf option still has some caffeine in it. Caffeine is a diuretic, meaning that it promotes the excretion of water instead.

Sugary drinks are not good for you either as they draw water from your body into your bowel, thus losing water in this way.

If it helps try drinking the water really cold OR hot with a squirt of lemon juice in it.

The main thing is to start increasing the water intake.

5. SLEEP

If your body says 'I need to lie down', then give yourself permission to do exactly that.

You are not being lazy or weak. What you are doing is allowing yourself to get into a state of rest and repose – which is vital for healing.

(Remember the opposite of stress - fight and flight)

Would you rather fold the washing or heal fully and quickly?

Would you rather struggle at work for longer than necessary, or cut yourself some slack and take the time you really need (and deserve) so that when you come back you are functioning at 100%.

Sleep is the greatest healer. There are so many biological processes that happen under the cover of a night's sleep that support and promote your healing.

If these processes can be interrupted if you don't get enough sleep and the suggestion is to have around 8 hours of good restful shut eye every night.

I would suggest that when you are recovering or healing, a nap is never time wasted.

What would you suggest a friend do? Are you allowing yourself to take your own advice?

6. ALCOHOL

Alcohol is not a good idea during the days leading up to your surgery and for a week or two afterwards. It is not a friend to your healing. This is because the liver which processes alcohol needs to be available to make the building blocks necessary for healing. Don't keep it distracted by having to process alcohol instead.

7. EXERCISE

A strong body is more prepared for surgery. The fitter your body is, the easier the heart and lungs are able to supply oxygen to the tissues which is key in a rapid recovery.

If you are already in a great routine of exercise and are able to continue with this until your scheduled date of operation that is great. Do so!

If however, you have always wanted to get around to doing more exercise then an impending operation could be a great incentive for you.

Of course, it is not a good idea to start with a 5km jog, followed by 20 laps of the pool. No, no!

Start with low intensity and low impact activity. Exercise can cover balance, strength, flexibility and the cardiovascular system (your heart and lungs and blood vessels), that loves a bit of a challenge.

Walk around the block, mow the lawns, do some gardening.

Exercise in your own lounge as you do the 'cross crawl' - your arm above your head and meeting your opposite knee. Start to increase the intensity when you can. Add in some press ups, sit ups, a plank.

Maybe go for a walk with increasing speed between every third and fourth lamp post, or a little run at various stages. The idea is to get a bit of a puff going!

Dancing, swimming, bowls, cycling can all be fun as well - a the added bonus of meeting others doing the same thing as well as burning calories!

Yoga, tai chi, pilates or gentle stretching could be a great way to start a low impact exercise programme. These improve your core, arm and leg strength and flexibility. You will find many all of these in a classes, at the gym or on YouTube if you prefer to be at home.

Start gently. Have fun!

As you do these new activities, tune into your body. Notice how your legs feel, your lungs and heart. Be cheerful in your observations - if you comment unceasingly about how difficult it is, then your body will respond with more difficulty. (Remember every cell is listening in for instructions).

If you are encouraging with your thinking about your efforts then you will find that your body is going to take less effort to do what you want it to do and progress will be easy.

Often an exercise regime has to be put aside during recovery and this is a problem for those who really miss it - the exercise itself or the time they give themselves to do it. Prepare a different version of your exercise - a run could turn into walking the dog for example. Or maybe it could be time for a new form of exercise to be started.

Improve your health, lift your mood and remain independent.

BONUS MISTAKE!

6. THEY DON'T WORK WITH A SURGERY COACH!

A surgery coach is the bridge for the important gap between the physical skill of your doctor and the mental and emotional apprehension and concerns you may be experiencing.

Doctors do a fantastic job. However your health is more than a physical event and there is so much more to surgery than on that physical level that we usually consider.

On the mental level, there is an enormous amount of information out there and gathering it up can make you feel better and for some people having that information helps them feel safer. Others prefer to know nothing! Some information is utterly misleading and causes more worry and unnecessary concern.

A surgery coach helps to make sense of all of that information, dispelling rumour or untruths.

And then there is the emotional level. Feelings, emotions, worries, hopes, doubts, dark and scary thoughts, uncertainty and fears be they at your conscious or unconscious awareness.

When we feel safe and nurtured, we trust ourselves to heal better.

When our anxieties are comforted we are in a better place to heal at the physically.

A surgery coach is someone skilled in the medical world as well as the arenas of helping these worries and fears, which can ambush your recovery.

Most medical professionals are under pressure to see more and more people, using their skills to deal with the urgent physical problems. But many don't know how to work at the *fears and worries*. Most don't know how to build within you the trust in your body, to promote a favourable surgical outcome.

A surgery coach is trained to help you regain trust in your innate healing ability, finding the confidence to produce in yourself a rapid recovery and great result.

Go into surgery stronger, get home sooner and back to your life.

A surgery coach will assist you in the physical, logistical aspect of the journey too, which helps even more to assist you in feeling in control, comfortable and safe.

The ingredients for faster than expected recovery!

If you are about to have surgery, being prepared is the best thing you can do for yourself.

Contact me now. Let's make sure you are ready!

www.paularalph.com

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A LITTLE BIT OF SCIENCE

Scientists investigating why wounds heal more slowly on patients who are stressed have found that psychological stress can increase the levels of some hormones in the blood. These hormones can slow the delivery of certain compounds – cytokines – to the site of the injury to start the healing process. But if the process is slowed at the beginning, the wound will take much longer to heal, posing potentially serious consequences to patients recovering from surgery. "There is a lot in the medical literature suggesting, if possible, that a patient should not be under stress before surgery," explained Jan Kiecolt-Glaser, professor of psychiatry and psychology at Ohio State University. "Stress, depression and anxiety prior to surgery have all been associated with poor surgical recovery"

Positive and negative expectations regarding the future are important for understanding the vulnerability to mental disorders, in particular mood and anxiety disorders, as well as to physical illness. A significant positive relation emerges between optimism and coping strategies focused on social support and emphasis on positive aspects of stressful situations.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2894461/

The implementation of upfront, preoperative habilitation ("prehabilitation"), as opposed to postoperative habilitation (rehabilitation), provides a unique opportunity to optimize surgical outcomes, while ensuring that patients receive necessary conditioning that may otherwise be significantly delayed by postoperative complications Contemporary Opportunity for Prehabilitation as Part of an Enhanced Recovery after Surgery Pathway in Colorectal Surgery.

The relationship between scores on Emotional Stability and on two cognitive coping strategies-Positive Thinking and Wishful Thinking-and the Consequences of Coping scale were examined in a group of 99 Spanish undergraduates. Positive Thinking was associated with high Emotional Stability and positive consequences, whereas Wishful Thinking was associated with low Emotional Stability and negative consequences.

Emotional stability, positive and wishful thinking, and consequences of coping in a Spanish sample. Ruiz VM1.