

Why You Should Not Smoke

It is known that people who smoke are much more likely to need spine surgery than people who don't smoke. Nicotine decreases the formation of new blood vessels. In addition, it causes a spasm in the small blood vessels that supply parts of your body, such as bones and discs. Because of poor nutrition to the discs and bones, they deteriorate faster; and this results in a higher likelihood of developing ruptured discs, degenerated discs and arthritis of the spine. A similar process explains why smoking doubles the risk of impotence (an inability to maintain an erection for sex) in men, and why smokers are likely to look much older than they would have if they never smoked due to premature wrinkle formation.

If you have a fusion operation, you should avoid all nicotine products. For the bone to heal, new blood vessels must grow into the dead bone that Dr. O'Neill has placed inside your spine. Nicotine prevents the formation of new blood vessels, and therefore, the dead bone stays dead. As Dr. O'Neill may have told you in the office, it is similar to planting a tree in the garden and then pouring poison next to the roots. New roots will not be able to sprout, the tree will not be able to obtain nutrition, and therefore, it will die. If the dead bone that Dr. O'Neill places in your spine does not get fed by new blood vessels, it will stay dead and a fusion will not occur. In some cases this will mean that you will continue to have pain. Imagine if you broke a bone in your arm and it never healed - every time that you used your arm, it would hurt.

Similarly, if the fusion doesn't occur, it is as though you have a broken bone that may hurt every time that you move. The pain may become so severe that you will require a second operation to get the bone to heal. If you want to avoid the second operation, you should quit smoking as soon as possible before your surgery and not take up smoking again until your bone has solidly fused. As stated above, one of the reasons why you might need surgery is because you are a cigarette smoker. If you take up smoking again after your operation, you are much more likely to need more surgery as the other levels break down. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you quit immediately, and do not take up cigarette smoking again.