

**December, 2019**

## **Paragon Orthopedic Center Grants Pass, Oregon**

### **N.P.O.**



### **Those 3 little pre-op letters and why they are so important**

If you have ever had surgery or accompanied someone through the surgical process, you have heard the letters NPO. They are Latin for *nil per os*, meaning nothing by mouth. You might be able to guess the reasons why you would need an empty stomach before having surgery, but maybe we can give you more information to better understand and endure the temporary fast.

#### **Aspiration Hazard**

Aspiration is a fancy word for getting food or liquid in your lungs. When you are sedated for a surgical procedure, your digestive and respiratory muscles relax, and you cannot protect your own airway to keep it clear. This puts you at greater risk for the contents of your stomach ending up in your lungs. If this should happen, your breathing is compromised and infection or pneumonia is a possibility. The tube the anesthesiologist puts in your throat to breathe during surgery helps to prevent aspiration, but having your stomach empty is the greatest safeguard from airway complications. So why do you need to be NPO the whole night before surgery? Your stomach needs hours to be completely empty. There is even a risk to chewing gum prior to surgery. Check with your surgeon about the specifics of what you can have before surgery to keep you the safest while in surgery.

#### **New Studies**

New research has changed the NPO policy in the past few years. It has been shown that patients can drink **clear liquids** until 2 hours prior to their surgery. Clear liquids are just as they sound: any drink that you can see through, like water or cranberry juice. Plain black coffee (no cream or sugar) is also acceptable as a clear liquid, which makes many adults happy. The guidelines are individualized for your particular surgery and needs, so discuss this with your surgeon to see if drinking clear liquids closer to your surgery time is an option for you.

#### **How Can I Cope Best?**

If you eat frequent, small meals, it might be more difficult for you to endure the fast, depending on your surgery time the next day. You could set an alarm to wake you up an hour before your NPO designated time to eat a light meal with protein, like a protein shake, a piece of pizza, or a boiled egg. Protein takes longer for the body to digest, so make sure your snack isn't all quickly digested simple carbohydrates, like cookies or chips.

#### **Can I Still Take My Medicines Before Surgery?**

Most medicines can be taken with a small sip of water, but the surgeon and anesthesiologist need to be told ahead of your surgery date what these medicines are. Some medicines might negatively interact with those given during surgery. Always discuss every medicine or supplement, both prescription and over the counter, with your surgeon and pre-op nurse prior to surgery.

Simply said, these are not difficult instructions to not eat/drink for the hours before your surgery and there are very good reasons for them. In the end, prepare well for your surgery because you are a part of the team. "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." -Benjamin Franklin

These articles were referenced for this newsletter:

<https://www.stiude.org/treatment/patient-resources/caregiver-resources/patient-family-education-sheets/procedures-tests-sedation/npo-no-food-or-drink-before-surgery.html>  
<https://www.mhealth.org/blog/2015/august-2015/no-food-or-drink-after-midnight-before-surgery-not-so-fast-experts-say>

