



## Full Version 8. Prepare for Surgery

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*If surgery is recommended, you need to ask what type of surgery, why you need it, possible risks and side effects. Be sure you understand what is to occur before you sign the informed consent form.*

## When a surgeon recommends surgery

Your doctor may advise you to have surgery. When a surgeon or a specialist recommends surgery, ask questions. Know what surgery is advised, why, and any possible problems.

## Questions to ask about surgery

- What type of surgery is recommended and why?
- What are the possible problems?
- What type of sedative (anesthesia) is used for this surgery and why?
- What type of surgery screening process will occur? Examples:
  - A pre-operation physical with your family doctor
  - A screening survey
  - Tests such as a cardiogram or chest x-ray, or other lab work may be needed depending on your age and other medical conditions
  - Attendance at a pre-admission clinic
  - A meeting with an anesthetist (doctor who gives the sedative before the surgery)
- What is the wait time for this surgery?
- Can I go on a cancellation list to try to move up the date of my surgery?
- Will you need to change your habits around eating, exercising, taking your medications and/or smoking?
- Will you need help at home as you heal?

## Know your rights as a patient

You have the right to informed consent. This means:

- You are to be told all about your condition, the surgery recommended and the reasons for surgery.
- You are to be told all the facts, an average person in your situation would want to know before making a decision.
- This includes:
  - Benefits and risks
  - Possible side effects
  - Treatment choices
  - Who will provide the treatment
  - Results of refusing the treatment
- You have the right to ask questions and receive clear and timely answers.
- You can ask your healthcare providers about their experiences and credentials.
- You should give your consent voluntarily, without feeling pressured.
- Parents (or guardians) have the right to give or refuse consent for their children, up to the age of 18 years.

To help you decide about surgery, you can:

- Bring a patient advocate or family member with you to meet the surgeon.
- Ask your written questions.
- Take notes about what was said.
- Ask the surgeon about his experience in doing this type of operation.
- Talk about your medical history, related family illnesses, medicines you take, and your daily habits.
- Review what you were told.
- Ask if there is written information on hand for you to review.
- Get a second opinion if it is a hard decision for you.
- Seek help from your patient advocate or family members in making your decision.

### If you agree to surgery

You will be told the following:

- How to prepare for surgery
  - This may involve a pre-surgery screening survey to look at your medical history. The medications you take will be written down. The purpose is to spot any possible medical risks. Pass along any known family history of medical problems.
  - If you have other medical risks such as a chronic disease like diabetes or heart disease, you may need a pre-surgery meeting with a nurse, surgeon or the doctor who gives the sedative. You may need labwork and a cardiogram, or chest X-ray, depending on your age and other medical conditions.
  - You may be asked the following questions:
    - Do you smoke cigarettes?
    - Do you have stomach acid reflux, sleep apnea (severe snoring where breathing may stop), previous strokes or heart disease, or asthma, allergies or allergic reactions?
    - Have you had sedatives (anesthetics) for surgery before? If so, when, and did you have any medical problems?
    - Do you have any loose teeth, dentures or body piercings?
    - Do you have any concerns or fears about the surgery?
- If you need a physical or tests done before the surgery
- Bring your medication card with you to show the nurse or doctor.
- Ask if you will get an antibiotic before your surgery.
- Depending on the surgery site, ask if you will be clipped or shaved. Clipper use is appropriate for any body part and decreases the incidence of wound infection.

You can ask about the sedative (anesthesia) to be used and why.

- Do you have a choice between a local and a general anesthetic (sedative)?
- For local anesthesia, you are awake for surgery, but the part of your body being operated on is frozen so you do not feel pain.
- For general anesthesia, you are asleep for surgery, without feeling pain.
- What are the all benefits, risks and side effects of the sedative to be used?
- Who is the doctor who will give the sedative?
- What are the risks in getting the sedative?
- What risks are involved with this surgery?
- Will you have pain after the surgery? If yes, for how long?
- How soon can you get out of bed after surgery?
- Will you need help with going to the toilet after surgery?
- Is a Safe Surgery Checklist used to make sure you are safe (as the patient)?
- What plan is in place if a problem occurs?

### Tips for communicating with healthcare providers

- How to prepare for meetings
  - Write down your questions, before you meet.
  - Ask your patient advocate to go with you to take notes. See *Choose Your Patient Advocate*.
- During meetings
  - Take notes of your talks with providers in your health journal.
  - Always ask about sedatives and pain management.
  - Ask for websites or resources to learn more about the surgery and recovery process.
  - Repeat facts you hear to be sure you are clear about what was said.
  - Record the name of your surgeon, the phone number, and contact information of staff.
  - Share your list of current medications. Carry a medication card to all meetings.
  - Ask providers if they use the **Safe Surgery Checklist**.
- After the meetings
  - Follow all orders about no food/liquids before surgery.
- Before you are sedated for surgery
  - Check your identification bracelet (name and birth date) – if there are errors, tell someone right away.
  - Ask staff to confirm the type of operation you are having and on what part of your body.
  - Ask the doctor to mark your body site where surgery will be done. Make sure it is correct.

- After surgery
  - Ask how you are to care for the surgery site.
  - Tell staff if and where you are feeling pain and have discomfort.
    - Pain medication can be given.
    - Anti-nausea medication can be given to stop vomiting.
    - Laxatives can be given to assist bowel movements.
  - Tell staff if you have fever, redness or swelling after surgery.

### Special questions to ask for surgeries held in medical offices/ clinics

- What risks are involved with this procedure?
- Does this medical office/clinic use a **Safe Surgery Checklist** to keep track of important steps in the surgery? (Most hospitals use safety checklists.)
- Is the office/clinic's checklist the same as the one used in a hospital?
- Is the medical equipment similar to a hospital operating room?
- Is there a recovery area with patient monitoring equipment?
- Who in the office/clinic is certified to give advanced cardiac life support?
- What plan is in place if a problem occurs?
- Will I be taken to a hospital if there is a complication?
- If yes, which hospital? How will I get there?
- Is there a cost to me (e.g. tray fee)?

### Resources

#### Canadian Resources

- Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) websites: [www.safetoask.ca](http://www.safetoask.ca) and [www.mips.ca](http://www.mips.ca).
- *Safe Surgery Saves Lives (SSSL) Checklist. Safer Healthcare Now!* <http://www.saferhealthcarenow.ca/EN/Interventions/SafeSurgery/Pages/default.aspx>
- *Information about Hand Hygiene.* Community and Hospital Infection Control Association (CHICA) Canada. [http://chica.org/links\\_handhygiene.html](http://chica.org/links_handhygiene.html)
- *Surgical Site Infections. Safer Healthcare Now!* <http://www.saferhealthcarenow.ca/EN/Interventions/SSI/Pages/default.aspx>
- *Finding Your Voice: Our Journey with Cancer through the Health Care System.* Dawn M. White. Winnipeg, MB: Friesens; 2009. [www.dawnmwhite.ca](http://www.dawnmwhite.ca)

#### Websites

- Consumers Advancing Patient Safety (CAPS) (United States). [www.patientsafety.org/](http://www.patientsafety.org/)

### Books and Brochures

- *Family Centered Patient Advocacy: A Training Manual.* Ilene Corina and Eve Shapiro (Editors). Wantagh, NY: Pulse of New York; 2007.  
<http://pulseofny.org/resources/FCPAP%2010%2029%20advocate.pdf>
- *Help Prevent Errors in Your Care.* Joint Commission.  
[www.jointcommission.org/speak\\_up\\_help\\_prevent\\_errors\\_in\\_your\\_care/](http://www.jointcommission.org/speak_up_help_prevent_errors_in_your_care/)
- *Partnering with Patients to Reduce Medical Errors.* Patrice L. Spath (Editor). Chicago: Health Forum; 2004.
- *Protect Yourself in the Hospital: Insider Tips for Avoiding Hospital Mistakes for Yourself or Someone You Love.* Thomas A. Sharon. Chicago: Contemporary Books; 2004.
- *Speak Up Initiatives.* Joint Commission (United States).  
[www.jointcommission.org/topics/patient\\_safety.aspx](http://www.jointcommission.org/topics/patient_safety.aspx)