



# What you can do to prepare for surgery.

Getting ready for surgery can be very stressful. Remember it's a team effort and you are part of that team. Talk with your doctor about why you need surgery, and how it may help you. And think about bringing a family member or a friend you trust, who can talk to your doctor and health care team about your progress while you are in the hospital.

Here are some things you can do to help make sure you get the best care:

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## 1. Be Informed About the Procedure

*Questions to ask your doctor before deciding to have surgery*

- **What kind of surgery are you recommending?** Get as much information as you can about the surgery, how it will help you and whether there are other options.
- **Why do I need the surgery?** Is it to relieve or prevent pain, improve a body function, or diagnose a problem?
- **What are the possible risks and benefits of the surgery?** Weigh the benefits against possible risks and side effects.
- **What if I don't have the surgery?** Find out how your health will be affected if you decide not to have the surgery.
- **How much experience do you have doing this surgery?** Ask how many times the doctor has performed the surgery.
- **What kind of anesthesia will I need?** Ask about possible side effects, and make sure the anesthesiologist is aware of any allergies you may have and all medications you are taking.
- **How long will my recovery take?** Ask when you can go back to work and exercise again. Also, find out if you will need medical supplies or equipment at home. Be sure to get them in advance.
- **Are any approvals or paperwork needed for your health insurance plan?** Some insurance plans require pre-approvals or second opinions for certain kinds of surgeries. Ask member services at your health plan well in advance of your surgery.

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## 2. Explore Your Options Before Choosing a Hospital

*Compare hospitals  
using quality ratings*

- **Ask your doctor, and research hospital quality ratings to locate a hospital that will give you the best care.** Check out these resources:
  - The Joint Commission** is the country’s leading organization for setting standards in health care: [www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)
  - Hospital Compare** is a government-sponsored site. It provides information on how well hospitals care for adult patients with certain medical conditions: [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)
  - The Leapfrog Group** is an organization formed by large employers to improve safety, quality and affordability of health care: [www.leapfroggroup.org](http://www.leapfroggroup.org)

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## 3. Before and During Your Hospital Stay

*Take steps to have a safe  
hospital stay and reduce the  
risk of infections*

- **Ask your doctor whether you should take antibiotics before the surgery.**
- **Follow all pre-surgery instructions carefully.** You will probably be asked to stop eating the night before surgery. You may be instructed to stop taking your regular medication or you may be given some special medication before you go to the hospital.
- **Ask your doctor to mark the actual site he or she will operate on.**
- **Let the hospital staff know about all the medications you are taking.** You should bring a written list of your medications. Or you can bring all of your medications (in their original bottles or packages) to the hospital with you.
- **Tell your doctor about any allergies.**
- **Ask all hospital staff who have direct contact with you if they have washed their hands.** Hand washing helps prevent infections.

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## 4. Recover Safely

*Know what to do after  
you leave the hospital*

- **Make sure you understand all instructions you are given when you leave the hospital.** Ask your doctor or nurse to give you a phone number to call if you have any questions.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse about all new medications.** For each, ask how to take it and why you need it. Also, ask about any side effects you might get and what to do if they occur.
- **Call your doctor if you have any problems.** This includes fever, weight loss, pain and oozing or swelling at the surgery site.

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## 5. Where to Learn More About Preparing for Surgery

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
[www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm)

The Joint Commission  
[www.jointcommission.org/patientsafety/speakup/](http://www.jointcommission.org/patientsafety/speakup/)

Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses  
[www.patientsafetyfirst.org/consumers/what-to-expect.html](http://www.patientsafetyfirst.org/consumers/what-to-expect.html)