

Having surgery? What you need to know

Questions to ask your doctor and your surgeon

This guide is for patients who are facing surgery that is not an emergency. Some of the questions may help you and your family understand more about your surgery, whether an alternative to surgery is appropriate, and whether it has to be done now or can be done later.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. You wouldn't buy a car or home without first doing some research, so why would you make a decision about your health without being a knowledgeable consumer? You need to understand what to expect from surgery.

Bring this guide with you on your visits to your attending physician and surgeon. We've included space for you to write notes about the information you receive.

Your doctors should welcome your questions. If you do not understand the answers, ask the doctor to explain them clearly. Bring a friend or relative along to help you talk with the doctor. Patients who are well informed about their treatment are more satisfied with their results.

Questions to ask your doctor and your surgeon

Why do I need an operation? Some operations can relieve pain. Others can reduce a symptom of a problem. Some are done to find a problem. Make sure you understand how the proposed operation will help fix your medical problem.

Notes: _____

What operation are you recommending? Ask your surgeon to explain the surgery and how it is done. Your surgeon can draw a picture or a diagram and explain the steps in the surgery. If there is more than one way of doing the operation, ask why your surgeon wants to do it that way.

Notes: _____

Are there alternatives to surgery? Sometimes surgery is not the only answer to a medical problem. Medicines, treatments other than surgery, or watchful waiting might help you just as well — or more. Ask what you would gain, or lose, by not having the operation now.

Notes: _____

What are the benefits of having the operation? Ask your surgeon what you will gain by having the procedure. Ask how long the benefits will last. Be realistic: Sometimes patients expect too much and are disappointed with the outcome or results. Ask your doctor if there is anything you can read to help you understand the procedure and its likely results.

Notes: _____

What are the risks of having the operation? All operations have some risk. Weigh the benefits of the operation against the risks of complications or side effects. Ask your surgeon how much pain there will be and what the doctors and nurses will do to help stop the pain.
Notes: _____

Where can I get a second opinion? Getting a second opinion from another doctor is a very good way to make sure that having the operation is the best choice for you. Make sure to get your records from the first doctor so that your tests do not have to be repeated.
Notes: _____

What kind of anesthesia will I need? Anesthesia is used so that surgery can be performed without unnecessary pain. Your surgeon can tell you why a certain form of anesthesia is best for your procedure.
Notes: _____

How long will it take me to recover? Your surgeon can tell you what kind of supplies, equipment, and help you will need when you go home. Ask how long it will be before you can go back to work or start regular exercise again. Always follow your surgeon's advice to make sure you recover fully as soon as possible.
Notes: _____

What are your qualifications? Ask if your surgeon is "board certified" in surgery. Surgeons with the letters F.A.C.S. are Fellows of the American College of Surgeons and have passed a review of their surgical skills by other surgeons.
Notes: _____

How much experience do you have doing this operation? You want a surgeon who has been well trained to do the surgery and has plenty of experience, of course. Discuss the surgeon's qualifications with your attending physician, and get more information about Oregon doctors at www.oregon.gov/BME.
Notes: _____

Where will the operation be done and how long will I be in the facility? Ask whether your operation will be done in the hospital or in an outpatient setting (where you go home the same day). Ask which of these is the preferred way for this surgery. Research shows that patients often do better when they have surgery in hospitals with more experience in the operation.
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