

AgePage

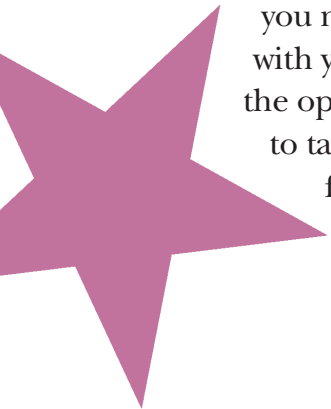
Considering Surgery?

Have you been told by your doctor that you need surgery? If so, you're not alone. Millions of older Americans have surgery each year.

For most surgeries, you will have time to find out about the operation, talk about other treatments with your surgeon (medical doctor who does the operation), and decide what to do. You also have time to get a second opinion.

Questions to Ask

Deciding to have surgery can be hard, but it may be easier once you know why



you need surgery. Talk with your surgeon about the operation. It may help to take a member of your family or a friend with you. Don't hesitate to ask the

surgeon any questions you might have. For example, do the benefits of surgery outweigh the risks? Risks may include infections, bleeding a lot, or a reaction to the anesthesia (medicine that puts you to sleep).

Your surgeon should be willing to answer your questions. If you don't understand the answers, ask the surgeon to explain more clearly. Answers to the following questions will help you make an informed decision about your treatment:

- ◆ What is the surgery? Do I need it now, or can I wait?
- ◆ Can another treatment be tried instead of surgery?
- ◆ How will the surgery affect my health and lifestyle?
- ◆ What kind of anesthesia will be used? What are the side effects and risks of having anesthesia?
- ◆ Will I be in pain? How long will the pain last?
- ◆ When will I be able to go home after the surgery?
- ◆ What will the recovery be like? How long will it take to feel better?
- ◆ What will happen if I don't have the surgery?
- ◆ Is there anything else I should know about this surgery?

Choosing a Surgeon

Your primary care doctor may suggest a surgeon to you. Your state or local medical society can tell you about your surgeon's training. Try to choose a surgeon who operates often on medical problems like yours.

Getting a Second Opinion

Getting a second opinion means asking another doctor about your surgical plan. It is a common medical practice. Most doctors think it's a good idea. With a second opinion, you will get expert advice from another surgeon who knows about treating your medical problem. A second opinion can help you make a good decision.

You can ask your surgeon to send your medical records to the second doctor. This can save time and money since you may not have to repeat tests. When getting a second opinion, be sure to tell the doctor about all your symptoms and the type of surgery that has been suggested.

Medicare may help pay for a second opinion. If you have a private supplemental health insurance plan, find out if it covers a second opinion.

Informed Consent

Before having any surgery, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This form says that the surgeon has told you about the operation, the risks involved, and what results to expect. It's important to talk about all your concerns before signing this form. Your surgeon should be willing to take the time needed to make sure you know what is likely to happen before, during, and after surgery.

Outpatient Surgery

Outpatient surgery, sometimes called same-day surgery, is common for many types of operations. Outpatient surgery can be done in a special part of the hospital or in a surgical center. You will go home within hours after the surgery. Outpatient surgery can cost less than an overnight hospital stay. Your doctor will tell you if outpatient surgery is right for you.

Planning for Surgery

There are many steps you can take to make having surgery a little easier.

Before surgery:

- ◆ Make sure you have your pre-operation tests and screenings, such as blood tests and x-rays.

- ◆ Be sure you have all your insurance questions answered.
- ◆ Make plans for any medical equipment or help with health care you will need when you go home.
- ◆ Arrange for an adult to drive you home and stay with you for the first 24-hours after surgery.
- ◆ Get written instructions about your care, a phone number to call if you have a problem, and prescription medicines you'll need at home.

The day of surgery:

- ◆ Leave your jewelry at home.
- ◆ Don't wear make-up or contact lenses to surgery.

Following surgery:

- ◆ Make sure you follow all your doctor's directions once you're home.
- ◆ Go for your scheduled post-operative check-up.
- ◆ Ask your doctor when you can return to your normal activities.

Paying for Surgery

The total cost of any surgery includes many different bills. Your surgeon can tell you how much he or she charges.

In Case of Emergency Surgery

An accident or sudden illness may result in emergency surgery. That's why you should always carry the following information with you:

- ◆ your doctor's name and phone number
- ◆ family names and phone numbers
- ◆ ongoing medical problems
- ◆ medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs
- ◆ allergies to medicines
- ◆ health insurance information and policy numbers

Make copies of this information to keep in your wallet and glove compartment of your car—just in case you need emergency care.

You may also be billed by other doctors, such as the anesthesiologist. There will be hospital charges as well. To find out what the hospital will cost, call the hospital's business office.

For information about Medicare benefits, call the toll-free customer service line at 800-633-4227. If you have secondary or supplemental health insurance, check to see what part of the costs it will pay. Talk to your surgeon if you can't afford the surgery.

For More Information

Here are some helpful Federal and non-Federal resources:

The American College of Surgeons

633 N. Saint Clair Street
Chicago, IL 60611-3211
800-621-4111
www.facs.org

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
800-633-4227 (toll-free)
877-468-2048 (TTY/toll-free)
www.medicare.gov

National Library of Medicine MedlinePlus

www.medlineplus.gov

For more information on health and aging, including the Age Pages *Choosing a Doctor* and *Hospital Hints*, contact:

**National Institute on Aging
Information Center**

P.O. Box 8057

Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

800-222-2225 (toll-free)

800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)

www.nia.nih.gov

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Visit NIHSeniorHealth

(*www.nihseniorhealth.gov*), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.



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