

Questions to Ask Before Agreeing to Surgery¹

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General Questions

All surgeries have risks and benefits. As the patient, you need to ask questions prior to surgery, especially elective surgery (an operation you choose to have performed). If your procedure is an emergency surgery, you will still want to get as many of these questions answered as possible. You can also inform your health care surrogate to be prepared to ask these questions for you.

It is usually advised to take a trusted person such as a spouse, adult child, or your health care surrogate with you for this visit. This gives you a second person to verify what you heard or what you did not hear. Taking notes during the visit is also suggested.

Even after reviewing all of these questions and answers, you may want to do further reading about your condition and the surgery itself. A variety of reputable associations, foundations, and societies provide additional information on their websites.

1. Why do I need surgery?

2. What are the benefits of having this surgery (i.e., will it eliminate my problem, slow my condition, reduce pain, etc.)? How long will the benefits last? Will I need additional surgeries?

3. What other treatment options might I consider (i.e., are there alternatives to surgery)?

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4. What will happen if I don't have this surgery?

5. What are the risks of this surgery and what are the success rates?

6. What is the surgeon's experience with this operation? How many times has the surgeon performed this operation? Has the surgeon performed this procedure in the hospital or setting you plan to use? What is the surgeon's success rate with this procedure?

7. What kind of anesthesia is required for this surgery?

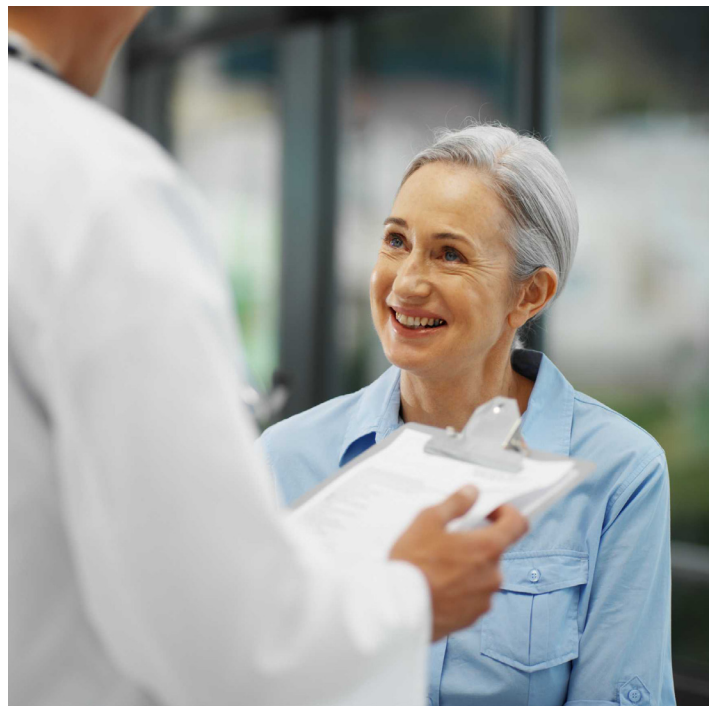


Figure 1. Before you agree to undergo surgery, make sure you ask your doctor important questions about the surgery, other treatment options, and the costs.

Credits: Stockbyte

8. Is there more than one way of doing the operation? For example, can the surgery be completed on an outpatient basis so that I can arrange to have appropriate care to recuperate at home instead of the hospital?

9. How long will it take me to recover? What kind of assistance, supplies, and/or equipment will I likely need after surgery? Who can help me make those arrangements?

10. Can you recommend someone to give me a second opinion?

Financial Questions

1. Who can answer my questions about the costs of this surgery?

4. How much of the cost will I personally be responsible for?

2. What is the cost of the operation and follow-up care?
Please note you may receive separate bills from the surgeon, hospital, and other doctors who care for you.

3. Contact your health insurance provider to determine if advance approval is needed for the surgery. If advance approval is needed, make sure you receive the approval in writing and keep the letter. Ask your health insurance provider these questions:

Is this surgery covered by my health insurance (or Medicare)?
