

Preparing for Surgery: What Every Patient Needs To Know

Preparing for surgery can feel overwhelming. From gathering medical information to organizing your home and personal needs, there's much to consider for a smooth process. But with the proper preparation, you can approach surgery day with confidence and peace of mind. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you prepare physically, mentally, and practically for a successful surgical experience.

1. Understand Your Surgery

Knowing the specifics of your procedure can reduce anxiety and improve preparedness:

- **Ask Questions:** Schedule a pre-surgery consultation with your surgeon. Discuss the surgery's purpose, expected outcomes, risks, and recovery details.
 - **Use Reliable Sources:** Educate yourself using trusted medical resources. Avoid diving too deep into technical explanations that might cause unnecessary worry.
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2. Follow Pre-Surgery Medical Instructions

Your doctor will provide essential pre-operative guidelines to minimize risks:

- **Medication Adjustments:** Certain medications, such as blood thinners or herbal supplements, may need to be paused. Always consult your healthcare provider before making any changes.
 - **Eat a Healthy Diet:** A balanced diet can support your body's healing. Limit alcohol and caffeine, as these can interfere with anesthesia and recovery.
 - **Fasting Rules:** If instructed to fast, usually from midnight before surgery, follow these directions to avoid anesthesia complications.
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3. Prepare Your Body Physically

Physical preparation helps your body recover faster and lowers the risk of complications:

- **Stay Active:** Light exercise like walking can keep you in shape, but avoid straining any areas involved in the surgery.

- **Quit Smoking:** Try to quit or cut down on smoking a few weeks before surgery to promote faster healing and reduce infection risk.
 - **Stay Hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water supports circulation and healing, so stay well-hydrated leading up to surgery.
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4. Plan for Your Recovery Needs

Planning for post-surgery recovery is essential for a smooth healing process:

- **Arrange Support:** Organize for a friend, family member, or caregiver to be with you after surgery, especially during the first few days.
 - **Set Up a Recovery Space:** Create a comfortable spot at home with pillows, blankets, and easy access to essentials.
 - **Stock Up on Supplies:** Before surgery, gather groceries, medications, and medical supplies, like gauze and over-the-counter pain relievers, to avoid last-minute trips.
 - **Arrange and complete any important documents:** It is always important to have all medical documents in order such as Medical power of attorney, Living will, Insurance documents, etc.
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5. Prepare Emotionally and Mentally

Mental and emotional preparation can help ease any fears and anxieties:

- **Practice Relaxation Techniques:** Deep breathing, meditation, and visualization can help calm your mind. Some find comfort in visualizing a successful surgery and quick recovery.
 - **Seek Support:** Talking with friends, family, or a therapist can provide reassurance. If you're feeling especially anxious, discuss your concerns with your healthcare team.
 - **Set Realistic Expectations:** Recovery can take time. Being patient with yourself can alleviate stress and help you heal more effectively.
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6. Preparing for Surgery

The day before surgery, complete these essential steps:

- **Shower and Shampoo:** Clean your body and hair thoroughly to reduce infection risk.

- **Eat Lightly:** Have a light meal the evening before surgery to avoid complications with anesthesia.
 - **Arrange Transportation:** Most surgeries require someone else to drive you home afterward, so plan for a friend, family member, or caregiver to help.
 - **Medication Pickup:** Some patients may need medications, such as Flomax (tamsulosin), which eases urination after surgery. Pick up prescriptions in advance and monitor for any side effects like dizziness.
 - **Fasting Instructions:** Refrain from eating or drinking anything after midnight the night before surgery, including water, gum, or mints. You may brush your teeth, and if advised, take medications with a small sip of water.
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7. The Day of Surgery

Arriving prepared can help make the process smooth and stress-free:

- **Wear Loose Clothing:** Choose comfortable, loose-fitting clothes that are easy to remove. You'll change into a hospital gown upon arrival.
 - **Avoid Makeup and Fragrances:** Refrain from using makeup, hairspray, or perfume.
 - **Remove Jewelry and Valuables:** Leave jewelry and other valuables at home to prevent loss or damage.
 - **Prepare for an IV Line:** A preoperative nurse will place an IV line to administer fluids and medications as needed.
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8. The Procedure

Understanding the basics of the procedure can help ease nerves:

- **Anesthesia:** Most surgeries require anesthesia. Anesthesia can be local anesthetic, conscious sedation (ie. colonoscopy), or general anesthesia. General anesthesia will relax your muscles and put you into a deep sleep so you won't feel pain. This type will also require intubation, where a tube is placed in your lungs to allow breathing.
 - **Procedure Steps:** For laparoscopic or robotic procedures, the surgeon will make small incisions and fill the abdomen with carbon dioxide gas for better visibility. The trocars (little tubes that connect to the instruments) are placed strategically in the abdomen to perform the surgery.
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9. Follow Post-Operative Care Instructions

After surgery, following these guidelines can help you recover safely and comfortably:

- **Pain Management:** Take prescribed pain medications as directed to support healing. Follow your doctor's pain relief plan, which may include narcotics or over-the-counter options like Tylenol.
 - **Attend Follow-Up Visits:** These appointments are essential for monitoring recovery and catching any potential complications.
 - **Ease Back into Activity:** Allow your body time to heal. Avoid lifting heavy objects (more than 20 lbs) or strenuous activities until cleared by your doctor.
 - **Caring for Your Incision:** Your incision may be closed with dissolving stitches and surgical glue, which will fall off within 7-10 days.
 - **Showering:** You can shower the day after surgery, but avoid soaking incisions in a tub or pool for two weeks.
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10. Post-Surgery Bowel Care

Anesthesia and medications can slow digestion, so it's common to have delayed bowel movements. Here's how to manage your bowel health:

- **Expect Delays:** Bowel movements may return 2-3 days after surgery.
 - **Stay Hydrated and Drink Juices:** Drinking water, pineapple juice, or prune juice can help.
 - **Use Stool Softeners:** If you haven't had a bowel movement after two days, consider a stool softener or Miralax.
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11. Managing Pain After Surgery

Effective pain management is key to a smooth recovery:

- **Follow Prescriptions Carefully:** Take prescribed narcotics as directed, being mindful of possible nausea or constipation.
- **Alternate Tylenol and Ibuprofen:** For mild pain, alternate Tylenol (500 mg every 4 hours) with Ibuprofen (600 mg every 6 hours with food). Reserve narcotics for severe pain only.
- **Use Ice and Heat:** Apply ice packs to the incision during the first 24 hours to reduce swelling, then switch to a heating pad if needed. Avoid sleeping with a heating pad to prevent burns.

12. Recognizing Complications: When to Call Your Doctor

Recognizing potential complications early can prevent more severe issues:

- **Drainage Issues:** Contact your doctor if you notice a white, tan, or green discharge from the incision.
- **Infection Signs:** Redness, heat, or significant pain around the incision site may indicate an infection.
- **High Fever:** Report any fever above 101°F.
- **Unmanageable Pain:** Severe pain not relieved by medication requires medical attention.
- **Persistent Nausea or Vomiting:** Nausea lasting more than four hours post-surgery can be a concern.
- **Urinary Difficulties:** Inability to urinate, especially with a full bladder, 8 hours after surgery is something to report.

Final Thoughts

Preparing for surgery involves more than just following instructions—it's about caring for your physical health and emotional well-being. By following this guide, you can face your surgery with greater confidence and peace of mind. Remember, your healthcare team supports you every step of the way, so don't hesitate to ask questions or voice concerns as you prepare for this important step toward better health.