



## **Better Surgery: What Can I Do?**

I am having surgery at NYU Langone Medical Center, which means that I am being cared for by an excellent healthcare team. Even so, it is important for me to speak with the doctors and nurses in order to help prevent mistakes that can happen before, during, or after surgery. It is important that I talk to the nurses and doctors about my medications and the type of surgery I will have. ***As a patient, I can make my care safer by being an active, involved and informed member of my healthcare team.***

As a hospital that is accredited by The Joint Commission, NYU Langone Medical Center follows a procedure that helps avoid these mistakes.

### **What can I do before my surgery?**

#### **Ask my doctor:**

- Are there any prescription or over-the-counter medicines that I should not take before surgery?
- Can I eat or drink before surgery?
- Should I cut my nails and remove nail polish?

Make a list of questions to ask my doctor. Take my list with me when I see my doctor so I remember to ask all of my questions.

#### **Ask someone I trust to:**

- Take me to and from the hospital.
- Be with me at the hospital. This person can make sure I get the care I need to feel comfortable and safe.

#### **Before I leave home:**

- Shower and wash my hair.
- Do not wear make-up. My healthcare teams need to see my skin to check my blood circulation.
- Leave my jewelry, money and other valuables (iPod, laptop, etc.) at home.

### **What can I do at the hospital?**

#### **Informed Consent**

**What is Informed Consent?** Informed consent means that:

- I know how my illness or condition will be treated.
- I agree to the operation or treatment.
- I understand the risks and benefits.



- I know about other treatments available to me.
- I know what can happen if I am not treated.

**Should I sign the Informed Consent?** I can decide if I will sign the paperwork or not after I understand all that is explained to me. I need to read it carefully and check:

- my name.
- the kind of surgery.
- the risks of surgery.

Before signing, I need to make sure that:

- everything on the form is correct.
- I have talked to my doctor about the surgery and asked questions.
- **all** of my questions have been answered. If I do not understand something on the form - I need to speak up and ask!
- I agree to have the surgery

NOTE: Though I may choose not to sign the informed consent, I must understand that if I do not sign then my surgery will not happen and my illness or condition may not get better.

**Before my surgery, my healthcare team will:**

- ask me the same question many times for my safety. They will ask:
  - my name.
  - what kind of surgery I am having.
  - the part of my body being operated on.

I can help by giving as much detail as possible as I answer these questions. I should give my legal name that is on my medical records instead of a nickname. I should give as much detail as I know about my surgery including which side of my body (right or left) and **exactly** what part of my body is being operated on. For example, I should say, “a tumor is being removed from the outside of my right thigh” instead of just saying “my thigh.”

- check the records from my doctor’s office.
- mark the spot on my body that will be operated on.
  - I need to make sure they mark only the correct part and nowhere else. For example, if I am having the big toe on my left foot amputated then I need to make sure that it is my left foot and the big toe on that foot that is marked.
  - I will usually be awake when the marking happens. If I can not be awake, a family member, companion, or another health care worker can watch the marking. They can make sure that the right part of my body is marked.



- My neck, upper back or lower back will be marked if I am having spine surgery. The surgeon will check the exact place on my spine in the operating room after I am asleep.
- I should ask my surgeon if they will take a “time out” just before my surgery. This is done to make sure they are doing the right surgery on the right body part on the right person.

**After my surgery, I will:**

- Tell my healthcare team about my pain. The team will help me to manage my pain.\*
- Ask questions about my medicines, especially any new medicine.
  - What is it? What is it for? Are there any side effects (rash, fever, dizziness, nausea, etc.)?
  - Tell my healthcare team about any allergies I have to medicines.
  - If I have more questions about a medicine, I should talk to my doctor or nurse before taking it.
- Find out about any IV (intravenous) fluids that I am given. These are liquids that drip from a bag into a vein.
  - Ask how long the liquid should take to “run out.”
  - Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- Ask my doctor if I will need therapy or medicines after I leave the hospital.
- Ask when I can go back to activities like work, exercise and travel.

\*This handout is adapted from The Joint Commission ([www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)) Speak Up™ program materials. The goal of the Speak Up™ program is to help patients become more informed and involved in their healthcare. Hospitals that are accredited by The Joint Commission must help relieve your pain.