



Better Surgery: How We Can Work Together

Having surgery at NYU Langone Medical Center means that I am being cared for by an excellent healthcare team. Even so, it is important for me to speak with my healthcare team in order to help prevent mistakes that can happen before, during or after surgery. It is important that I speak with my healthcare team about my medications and the type of surgery I will have.

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

As a patient, I can make my care safer by being an active, involved and informed member of my healthcare team. This is more than just doing what my healthcare team asks me to do. It means asking questions as well as providing information about my medical history and how I am feeling.

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 and bring it with me when I see my doctor.

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 go to the hospital:

- Shower and wash my hair unless my doctor tells me not to.
- Remove all makeup. My healthcare team needs to see my skin to check my blood circulation.
- Check that I do not have jewelry, money and other valuables (iPod, laptop, etc.) with me.

What can I do at the hospital?

Give my informed consent (permission)

- **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 consent form 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 I am having.
- the risks of surgery.

Before signing, I need to make sure that:

- everything on the form is correct.
- I have discussed the surgery with my doctor.
- **all** of my questions have been answered. If I do not understand something on the form or something that is explained to me- 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 I cannot have my surgery and my illness or condition may not get better.

Before my surgery, my healthcare team will:

- ask me the same questions 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 the 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 is done. If I cannot be awake, a family member, loved one or another healthcare provider can be there to make sure that the correct 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. A “time out” is used to review that 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 any pain I may be having. 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)?
 - Tell my healthcare team if I am allergic to any medicines.
 - If I have more questions about a medicine, I should talk to my healthcare team before taking it.
- Find out about any IV (intravenous) fluids that I am given. These are liquids that drip through a small tube 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, too slow or not at all.
- 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.

What will my healthcare team do to protect me from infection after surgery?

An incision is the cut that your doctor makes in order to do your surgery. With all surgery there is a risk of the incision getting infected after surgery. My healthcare team will take the following steps to protect me from getting this kind of infection. I understand that some of these steps may not apply to the type of surgery I am having. My healthcare team will explain which of these steps apply to me and my surgery.

- Use clippers (not razors) to shave the area that will be operated on.
- Give me antibiotics right before and after my surgery.
- Give me antiseptic cloths with instructions that explain how to wipe my skin with them before my surgery.
- Give me a prescription for an antiseptic ointment to use in my nose before my surgery.
- Monitor my temperature, blood sugar and oxygen levels and use appropriate methods to keep them normal during and after surgery.

*This handout is adapted from The Joint Commission (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.