



You have just been told
that you might need surgery.
Now what do you do?

A Guide to Managing Surgery

From the Surgical Services of
New York Hospital Queens



Member

 **New York-Presbyterian Healthcare System**

 Affiliate: Weill Medical College of Cornell University

A Guide to Managing your Surgery with Confidence.



What if your knees are hurting so badly you can hardly walk?

Or you are getting short of breath and feeling exhausted with almost every step?

Or you have some other symptom that makes your physician think you might need surgery?

Facing the prospect of surgery can be a scary and confusing experience. You may ask yourself: Who will do the operation? What hospital will I go to? How good are they?

Will I be alright?

Preparing for surgery does not have to be overwhelming. Taking the steps outlined in this brochure can help you to understand your physician's recommendations and to feel more secure.

When you are facing the prospect of surgery, you need to make some of the most important decisions of your life. But you are not alone. An entire team of health care professionals is waiting to help you, starting with your primary care physician.

Your job will be to get the information you need to understand your situation and to help you make choices. **These guidelines from physicians and patients will show you the way.**



MANAGING YOUR SURGERY

Gather and record information.



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People vary in how much and what they want to know. Many feel that being well informed is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety. “The more you know, the better you will do,” advises a hysterectomy patient from Breezy Point. “Having information was very important to me. I felt more confident knowing exactly what was going to happen and what was expected of me.”

The key is knowing where to look and what questions to ask. **Here is what you should find out...**

About your situation.

When your doctor says you might need surgery, ask three simple but important questions recommended by the Partnership for Clear Health Communication:

What is my main problem?

What do I need to do?

Why is it important for me to do this?

Find out about the nature of your condition, the tests that are being recommended, and why your doctor is referring you to a particular surgeon and hospital.



Write down your questions as they occur to you and be sure you understand the answers. If the explanations seem too technical, ask to have them repeated in simpler terms. Write down the answers – or tape-record the conversation. Take a family member or friend with you to help.

You can ask your doctor for additional sources of information such as a Web site, hotline number or brochure. You can also look to family members and friends who have had the same surgery, the surgeon to whom you are referred, and the Web sites listed at the end of this brochure.

About your surgeon.

Your physician will refer you to a surgeon with a high level of expertise in the operation you are considering. In addition, that person should have a personal manner with which you feel comfortable. “The minute I met my surgeon, I felt at home with him,” recalls a joint replacement patient from Jackson Heights, “and from then on, I wasn’t afraid. It was like we had an understanding.” Both patients and physicians agree that the emotional component of this experience is as important as the medical and surgical.

Take any test results, films or other records with you to your meeting. Your surgeon should spend time listening to your concerns. He or she should answer your questions and offer explanations in plain language that is easy to understand. Translation services should be available to those for whom English is a second language.

If you are seeking a surgeon without the benefit of a referral from a primary care physician, there are a number of factors to consider. These include: where they received their training, whether they have a faculty appointment at a medical school, how long they have been in practice, how often they have performed this surgery, and with what outcomes or success rates. You can ask the surgeon directly for this information.

Surgeons practicing at New York Hospital Queens have had extensive educational preparation in major medical schools and hospitals across the country and around the world. They have earned academic degrees and numerous professional credentials that testify to their advanced knowledge and achievement.

And they continue to learn every day, through self-study, attendance at conferences, collaboration with colleagues, and participation in research and teaching.



The proof of their expertise lies in the results of their surgery. The surgical outcomes at New York Hospital Queens are among the best in the country.

About your treatment options.

One of the first things a surgeon will do is determine whether or not you actually need surgery. Occasionally, nonsurgical treatment options are available, or an operation is not your best option for treatment. Be sure to investigate your nonsurgical options, and ask your surgeon whether you have a nonsurgical choice. Have your surgeon make you aware of all treatment choices available to you and be sure you understand each – especially any surgical procedure recommended.

About the hospital.

The surgeon suggested by your physician will be affiliated with a hospital that is well prepared to care for you before, during and after surgery. You can learn about the hospital by looking at its Web site, asking someone who works there, or asking the surgeon.

The hospital should be a tertiary care center, which offers the highest level of care available, and a teaching hospital.



It should also have a full complement of the specialized services and staff that support major surgeries, such as laboratories, anesthesia, radiology, radiation oncology and chemotherapy, nursing, nutritional services, pharmacy and physical therapy.

The surgeon or hospital will also have educational information for patients. Ask your surgeon what materials or special pre-operative programs are available to help you understand what to expect during and following your surgery. “My surgeon conducts a two-hour orientation on risks and benefits,” notes a bariatric patient from Flushing. “He explains the surgery itself and the possible complications as well as what the Surgery Department does to prevent them. He also describes the benefits of the surgery, which include not only weight reduction but significant improvement in obesity-associated illnesses such as diabetes. That is very encouraging.”

Location may also be important. Most patients prefer to stay close to home, where they feel a greater comfort level. “I grew up across the river and this was my first hospital experience outside

of Manhattan,” reports a breast surgery patient from Long Beach. “I couldn’t believe the care I got here. It was the best, and I am recommending it to everyone.”

Being close to home makes it easier for family and friends to visit and for your primary care physician to check in if needed. The hospital will also keep your physician informed of your progress during your stay.

About surgical outcomes.

What are your results? is one of the most important questions a prospective patient can ask a surgeon and a hospital.

Major surgery is risky, and sometimes produces complications such as infection, heart attack and stroke, or even death.

The surgical teams at New York Hospital Queens are dedicated to preventing these complications through a continuous examination of surgical results known as “outcomes,” and a constant focus on patient safety.





Organize a support network.

Excellent outcomes are achieved through a number of factors:

Proficiency. A combination of expertise and experience. The more times a procedure is performed, the greater the ability to do it well.

Teamwork. Excellent communication among the hospital staff assures that all systems are working as they should.

Evidence-based practice. Treatment is based on up-to-date information from research. In addition, surgical policies and procedures undergo an intensive ongoing internal review.

Due to the rigorous efforts of surgeons, nurses and many others throughout the hospital, the surgical services of New York Hospital Queens have achieved some of the best outcomes in the country in such complicated procedures as vascular surgery, colon surgery, and bariatric (obesity) surgery.

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When you are facing surgery, it will help to build a support network of family and friends as well as health care professionals. But start by supporting yourself. Pay attention to your questions and concerns and get them addressed. Stay active and be optimistic. A positive mental attitude will aid in your recovery.

Many patients find it helpful to talk with someone who has been through the same experience. They understand what you are thinking and feeling and can offer invaluable perspectives and encouragement.

There are many people standing by to provide support before, during and after surgery. For example, your surgeon or nurse can arrange for someone to meet with you while you're in the hospital.





“I found it so reassuring to talk to someone who had had the surgery,” recalls a quadruple bypass patient from Bayside, “that I’ve thought about becoming a volunteer myself.” He continues to feel supported, he says, during regular monitored exercise at the Cardiac Health Center. “There’s a camaraderie there that’s as good for your mental conditioning as the exercise is for your body.”

Many post-surgical patients find they benefit from joining one of the many support groups available, organized by the hospital, community centers, or places of worship. A hospital staff member can refer you to one of these groups.

Your family and friends will also want to be supportive but may not know how. Offer suggestions as to what would be most helpful.



Don't go home without a follow-up plan.

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Before you are discharged from the hospital, make sure you get complete instructions on what to do after you leave – and that you understand and follow them.

The first question to ask on discharge is: *What do I need to know now?* Depending on your general health and the nature of your surgery, you may need instructions on a variety of matters such as medication, diet, physical therapy, regular exercise, or use of special equipment. You will need to know whether a nurse or aide will visit you, and when. You will also need to determine when to see your surgeon and primary care physician for follow-up visits. In addition, make sure you go home with a copy of any reports that may have been sent to your primary care physician.

One very important question is: *What kinds of activities can I do?* This subject is a cause of concern for many patients, who are often able to do more than they think they can. Be sure to discuss this with your physicians and nurses before you leave the hospital.

Knowing what to expect and what to do when you go home will foster peace of mind and a successful postoperative course.



NUMBERS TO CALL AT NEW YORK HOSPITAL QUEENS

800-282-6684 For referral to a New York Hospital Queens-affiliated physician in your area.

For questions about surgical services:

718-670-1231 Main phone number

718-670-1572 General surgery,
Department of Surgery

718-670-1185 The Breast Center

718-670-1517 Gynecologic surgery

718-670-2627 Heart and Chest surgery

718-670-2558 Orthopedic surgery

ONLINE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

nyhq.org The Web site of New York Hospital Queens.

nyhq.org/surgery.html New York Hospital Queens general surgery Web site.

webmd.com One of the leading sources of online health information. Includes a comprehensive directory of more than 4,000 diseases and conditions, explanations of medical tests, and information on drugs.

health.allrefer.com Presents a large selection of surgical procedures with pictures. Also features a medical “encyclopedia.”

upstate.edu/library/healthinfo From the Health Information Center of SUNY Upstate Medical University. Provides many links by topic, as well as government links and a service tutorial on finding good information. **315-464-4410**

http://spiral.tufts.edu Selected patient information resources in seven Asian languages, a joint initiative of the South Cove (Massachusetts) Community Health Center and the Tufts University Hirsch Health Sciences Library. Includes links to other Asian health sites.

www.health.state.ny.us An extensive database of health care information including hospital and physician profiles, a glossary of terms, links to the Center for Consumer Health Care Information and others. In Chinese, Creole, English, Spanish, and Russian.

ahrq.gov The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality maintains a large site covering substantive health care issues. Includes information on outcomes and effectiveness, national quality measures and patient safety, among many other topics.

New York Hospital Queens is a 439-bed teaching hospital that provides both the comfort of a community setting and the sophistication of a tertiary care center. It maintains a full complement of advanced health care services as well as major programs of research and residency training. Hospital personnel are up-to-date with current knowledge and practices and help to create advancements in health care through their research.

The hospital maintains one of the leading trauma services and emergency rooms in the metropolitan area. It also performs all operations except transplants, which are limited to a few regional centers.

Surgical services include a significant volume of major surgeries each year, such as coronary artery bypass, total joint replacement, excisional breast biopsy, procedures for gynecological malignancies, and a wide range of general surgery and subspecialty procedures such as vascular surgery, colon surgery and bariatric (obesity) surgery.

New York Hospital Queens is a member of the New York-Presbyterian Healthcare System and an affiliate of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University. It is known for its high standards of surgical performance and for outstanding outcomes that are frequently better than the reported national averages.



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