



Your Health. Your Decisions.



Considering Surgery? How to Make an Informed Decision

KnovaSolutions Can Help!

Deciding if surgery is right for you can be challenging. Your KnovaSolutions clinician can help you understand complicated medical information, weigh risks and benefits, identify potential alternatives, help problem-solve work and home situations, and much more. Plus, we'll listen carefully with an empathetic ear!

Call us today: **800/355-0885**

Deciding to have surgery at any time is challenging, and the COVID-19 pandemic adds another layer of complexity to the decision. Since all surgeries have risks and benefits, it helps to carefully review questions and other considerations with your healthcare provider, insurance carrier, employer and support persons. Patients who make informed decisions about having a surgery or procedure tend to be more satisfied with the outcome.

If you are facing emergency surgery, you may not have time to ask many questions. If your appendix is inflamed and about to burst, surgery is the only treatment; the sooner the better. When you do have time to prepare, especially if you're considering an elective procedure, use these bullets to decide if surgery is right for you:

- ◇ Symptoms. Being specific about your symptoms can help your provider understand your situation and make recommendations. Make a list of your symptoms, when they started, if they are periodic or constant, how long they last and if anything (such as position or medication) helps to relieve them. Be sure to mention if and how symptoms keep you from your normal activities.
- ◇ Alternatives. Sometimes symptoms can be treated without surgery; lifestyle changes or other options may offer some relief.

What non-surgical options have you tried? Are there others to consider, like physical therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, diet adjustments, yoga, weight loss?

- ◇ Risks and benefits. Surgery always involves some risk. Anesthesia carries risk, as does spending time in a hospital. Learn what the risks and benefits are for you, given your health status. The same surgery may be better suited for one person than it is for another. Consider if the benefits of surgery outweigh the risks for you. Will the surgery ease pain or get rid of it? Will the surgery improve how your body works or prevent your condition from worsening? Is it an option to watch and wait, maybe try an alternative?
- ◇ Timing. In the case of an emergency, there may be few decisions to make. Sometimes, surgery must be done right away to correct or repair a serious medical concern. If not an emergency, talk to your provider about whether surgery can be scheduled when convenient (before a weekend, during time off, when helpers are available) or does it need to be done now?
- ◇ What to expect. Before surgery, expect that a physical, blood work and COVID testing (maybe more than once) will likely be required. And, knowing what to



The Road to Recovery

If you decide to have surgery, be sure to take these steps to help your body heal:

- Don't try to do too much too soon. Becoming too active or not using recommended caution can slow recovery, or worse, land you back in the hospital.
- When you are cleared to move around, do it. Staying in bed can cause your muscles to weaken, blood clots to form and other problems.
- Continue those breathing exercises; they help your lungs recover from anesthesia.
- Take recommended medications; they are intended to help you recover and manage chronic conditions.
- Eat and drink to give your body the fuel it needs to mend.
- Go to physical therapy if it's been prescribed. It can help you build strength and recover safely.
- Return to work when you and your provider agree it is safe.
- Drive when your provider says you've healed. Your reaction time is slower when you are recovering.

The information contained in this newsletter is for general, educational purposes. It should not be considered a replacement for consultation with your healthcare provider. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

expect *after* surgery can aid the recovery process. Ask what recovery will look like. Will you have post-surgical pain? Will over-the-counter medications (ibuprofen or acetaminophen) help or will opioids be prescribed? If opioids are recommended, how long is an appropriate time frame to take them and will a stool softener be needed too? Depending upon the surgery, you may need support at home with meals, bathroom use and cleaning. Ask about physical limitations you might have (such as with driving or lifting children). When will you be able to return to work and resume activities? Will follow-up visits or procedures be required? Knowing what to expect will help pave the way to recovery with fewer surprises.

- ◇ Providers. Do you need a referral for a specialist in the field and do you know how to select one who is in network? You can ask the provider if s/he is board certified, how many times she/he has performed the surgery and what their success rate is. Get a feel for the doctor. Ask yourself if you feel comfortable in their presence and trust them to perform your surgery. Do you want a second opinion? You may also want to do a quality check on the hospital or surgical center by checking their ratings and inspection history.
- ◇ Insurance and coverage. Knowing the financial impact of the surgery in advance allows you to plan better for it. Your insurance may or may not cover everything. Do you need pre-approval from your plan, and do you request it or does the provider do so? If the provider and facility are in network, you will pay less out of pocket. Will you be responsible for co-pays, deductibles or other expenses? Will other providers, such as an anesthesiologist, be involved, and are they in network? If you've chosen out-of-network providers, what will your out-of-pocket cost be?

- ◇ Work considerations. If you are employed, you'll need to discuss scheduling time away with your manager. If you have flexibility (your surgery is not time-sensitive), you may be able to agree on a mutually beneficial time to take time off. Your Human Resources (HR) department can provide information about sick leave policies, as well as use of and eligibility for FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act), short-term disability and long-term disability.
- ◇ Returning to work. Anticipating your needs in advance and communicating them to your manager and HR as needed will facilitate a smoother reentry. When returning to work, will you have any physical limitations? Will you need special accommodations, such as reduced work hours, special equipment or extra breaks during the workday?

Medical Care in COVID-19 Times

While our attention has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, it's still important to seek medical care for new, unusual symptoms and for managing chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. This is not the time to ignore your health!

Every provider and healthcare center have instituted COVID-related policies for the protection of patients and caregivers. When weighing the pros and cons of having surgery now, ask your provider what additional precautions will be taken to protect you during your hospital or facility stay. In the meantime, wear your mask, wash your hands and maintain social distance!

KnovaSolutions clinicians are specially trained to help people make healthcare decisions. We are available to help you and your family members when facing any decision, small or large. Call **800/355-0885** Monday to Friday, 8 am-8 pm, MT.