Tips for Safer Surgery

What you should know • What you can do

Courtesy of the Surgical Care Improvement Project Partnership

Millions of people have surgery each year. Every surgery has risks, but we know there are some that can be prevented. What does this mean to you as a patient? If your doctors and nurses follow some simple steps, you will have a shorter and safer hospital stay.

Questions to Ask Your Doctors and Nurses Before Surgery

One way you can help lower your risk for problems from your surgery is to talk with a member of your surgical care team before surgery about the type of care you should receive. Your care team includes your surgeon, your anesthesiologist and your nurses. Ask your doctor or nurse who you should discuss this tip sheet with and when. This tip sheet will help you know what to ask.

To avoid infection–

If I need antibiotics before surgery, when will I receive the antibiotic and for how long?
Antibiotics should given within 60 minutes before surgery and should be stopped within 24 hours in most cases. Given properly, antibiotics can greatly lower your chances of getting an infection after surgery.

If hair needs to be removed from the part of my body that is having surgery, what will you use?
Your doctor or nurse should use clippers to remove hair if needed at the site of your surgery. Using a razor to remove hair before surgery can cause infections because of the risk of leaving small cuts on the skin.

To avoid blood clots–

What will you do to prevent blood clots?
Blood clots can lead to heart attacks and strokes. When you have surgery, you are at risk of getting blood clots because you do not move while under anesthesia. The more complicated your surgery, the higher your risk. Your doctor will know your risk for blood clots and steps that will help prevent them, such as giving you the right medicine before surgery.

To avoid heart attacks–

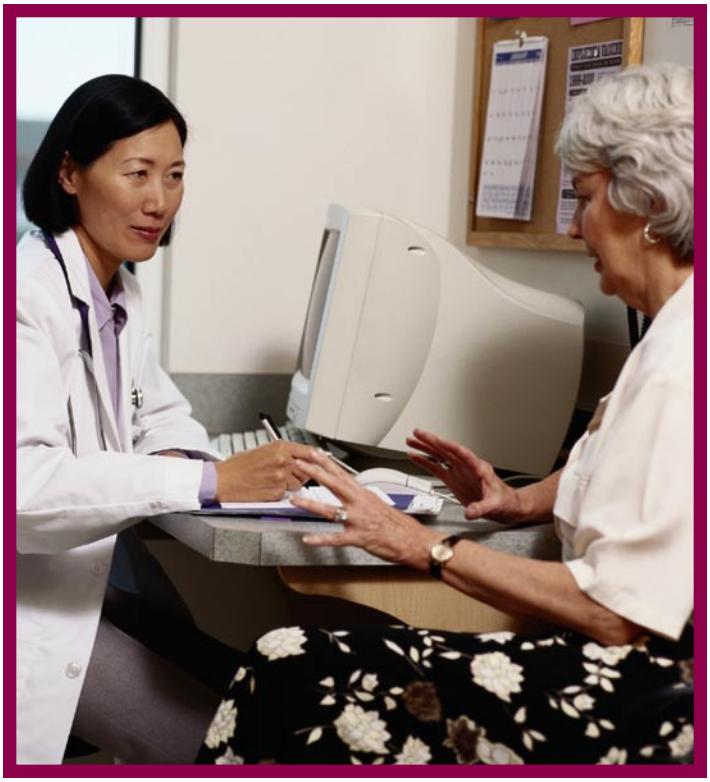
If I take medicine for heart disease, should I keep taking it?
Taking certain medicines together can cause problems. Tell your doctor about all the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter things like aspirin and herbal remedies. Your doctor or nurse will tell you which medicines you should continue to take and which medicines you should stop taking before surgery.

Other Information

- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you may have, such as allergies or diabetes. These problems could affect your surgery and treatment.
- Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit.
- If you do not see them do so, ask your care team members to wash their hands before examining you.
- Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.

Other Resources

- For information on preparing for surgery, please visit ***http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm***, which offers additional questions to ask your physician and surgeon about your surgery.
- For information on quality of hospital care, visit Hospital Compare at ***http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov***. It includes information on how often hospitals provide some of the recommended care to get the best results for most patients.
- For information on the Joint Commission's Speak Up™ program, which includes safety tips for surgical patients and infection prevention, visit ***www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp***.
- For patient information concerning anesthesia, please visit ***http://www.asahq.org/patientEducation.htm.***
- For more information concerning surgery, visit the American College of Surgeons at ***http://www.facs.org/public_info/ppserv.html***.
- If you have additional questions, please contact your doctor.



About SCIP

The Surgical Care Improvement Project (SCIP) is a large national partnership dedicated to reducing the number of preventable surgical complications. SCIP includes a number of steps that surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses and patients can take to lower the number of surgical problems.

SCIP Surgical Care Improvement Project
A National Quality Partnership

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