

Facts Sheet

Important Questions to Ask About Your Child/Young Persons Surgery

Please Read This Sheet Before You Agree to Your Child/Young Persons Operation.

Does your child/young person need surgery?
Most operations are not emergencies. This means you have time to ask the surgeon questions about the operation and time to decide whether your child/young person should have it, and if so, when and where.

The referring doctor believes that surgery may be required. However, before you agree to the operation, you should ask the doctor or surgeon these important questions. The answers to these questions will help you understand more about the operation so you can make the best decision regarding the surgery.

Remember, if you do not understand the answers, it is important to ask the doctor to explain them again.

Please note: This information does not apply to emergency surgery.

Why is my child/young person needing an operation?

Ask your doctor and surgeon to explain what is wrong so that you can understand how the operation fits in with your child/young person's medical condition. There are many reasons for having surgery. Some operations can relieve or prevent pain. Others can reduce a symptom of a problem or improve some body function.

Some operations are performed to diagnose a problem. Surgery can also save a life. Your surgeon will tell you the purpose of the operation.

What type of operation is needed?

Ask the surgeon to explain what will happen during the operation. For example, if something is going to be repaired or taken out, find out why. The surgeon can draw a picture and explain what will happen. Ask where the cuts will be and how big they could be.

Ask if there are other ways of doing the operation. Ask why the surgeon wants to do the operation one way over another.

The surgeon will perform the surgery that you have agreed to and that is written on the consent form to correct the medical condition.

However if a serious complication happens, the surgeon will do whatever is necessary to save your child's/young person's life.

What kind of anaesthesia will be needed and what are the risks?

Anaesthesia is used so that surgery can be performed without unnecessary pain. The anaesthetist will discuss with you the type of anaesthesia required for the procedure.

Ask what the side effects and risks are. Be sure to tell the anaesthetist what medical problems your child/young person has including allergies and any medications (including herbal medications) your child has been taking. These may affect how the anaesthesia works.

What are the risks of this operation?

All operations have some risk. This is why you need to look at both the risks and the benefits before you make a decision. Ask the surgeon to explain these risks.

Some people have an increased risk of complications because of other medical conditions. Ask what risks your child/young person has and why.

What are the complications of this operation?

Complications can happen at the time of the operation, or there may be side effects after the operation. Ask about the possible complications and side effects of the operation.

There is usually some pain with surgery. Ask how much there will be and what the doctors and nurses will do to reduce the pain. Controlling the pain will help your child/young person feel more comfortable, get well faster, and improve the results of the operation.

What are the benefits of having the operation?

Ask the surgeon what will be gained by having the operation. Ask how long the benefits will last. For some operations, the benefits only last a short time. A second operation may be needed later. For other operations, the benefits may last a lifetime.

When finding out about the benefits of the operation, be realistic. Sometimes people expect too much and are disappointed with the results. Ask your surgeon if there is any information about the benefits of the operation.

Are there alternatives to surgery?

Sometimes, surgery is not the only answer to a health problem. Medicines or other non-surgical treatments might help just as much or more.

Another option may be “watchful waiting”, in which you and the doctor check to see if your child/young person’s problem gets better or worse. Ask the surgeon or your family doctor what other treatments there are, the benefits and risks, and if they are available to your child/young person.

What if my child/young person does not have this operation?

Based on what you learn about the benefits and risks of the operation, you might decide that your child/young person should not have the operation. Ask the surgeon what will be gained – or lost – by not having the operation now. Could your child/young person be in more pain? Could your child/young person condition get worse? Could the problem go away?

What if I am uncertain about the surgery?

If you have any doubts about the surgery, you may need to have another appointment with your GP or the surgeon. If you are still uncertain, it may be necessary for you to arrange for a second opinion.

Who will do the operation and what are their skills?

Ask the surgeon who will be doing the operation. The surgeon works in a team and other doctors who have the necessary experience may do part or all of the operation as part of their medical training program. If you are worried about this, tell the surgeon. You can ask the surgeon about his or her recent success and complications with this operation.

How long will it take my child/young person to recover?

Ask if your child/young person’s operation will be done as day surgery. If not, ask when your child/young person will have to come in to hospital and how long he/she will be there.

Your surgeon can tell you how your child/young person might feel and what they will be able to do after the operation. Ask when regular exercise can start again and when they can go back to a usual routine. Make sure you follow the surgeon’s advice.

Do you want more information about your surgery?

Useful links

http://www.health.qld.gov.au/quality/10_Tips/default.asp This information is also available in multiple languages.

Free booklets on what you should know about anaesthesia is available on the internet from the Australian Society of Anaesthetists.

<http://www.asa.org.au/page.aspx?A=5461>

For information on Queensland Health Interpreter Service go to:

http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/interpreters/QHIS_what_expect.asp

Acknowledgements to: Be Informed: Questions to Ask Your Doctor Before You Have Surgery. AHCPA Publication No. 95-0027, Jan 1995. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, Rockville, MD.

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