



**What to ask, think about, and do, if you might be having an operation**

**Introduction**

Were you given this booklet by your GP, or a surgical doctor, or did you find it online?

Are you thinking about having an operation?

Have you already decided to have an operation?

This booklet covers what to ‘ask’, ‘think about’, and ‘do’ at each stage of your surgical journey.

This will help you:

* Make the right choice for you
* Prepare for surgery
* Have the best possible result and recovery

You might want to bring this with you when you come to hospital



Scan the QR code to find out more or view the information [here](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/patients):

**The time before possible surgery**

**Think about what is important to you**

Before you see the surgical team in clinic think about

* How much do you want to know about what an operation would involve?
* Do you want to bring a relative or friend to the hospital appointment?
* What do you hope the operation will help with?
* What do you not want to happen?

**Get ready for an operation**

Make [small changes](https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/documents/fitter-better-sooner/introduction) now so you recover better *if* you decide to have an operation

* [Stop smoking](https://www.cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/smoking-cessation)
* [Reduce alcohol](https://www.cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/alcohol-moderation)
* [Lose weight or improve what you eat](https://www.cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/nutrition)
* [Be more active](https://www.cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/exercise)
* [Focus on wellbeing](https://cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/mental-wellbeing)

Scan the QR code to find out more or view the information [here](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/top-7-interventions):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stop smoking** | **Stopping smoking lowers the risk of problems after surgery**Contact a stop smoking scheme for helpSet a quit dateAsk family and friends to support you |
| **Reduce alcohol** | **Try to stick to recommended limits (14 units per week)**Have alcohol free daysTry alcohol free optionsChange your activities to avoid triggers |
| **Lose weight or improve what you eat** | **Work towards being a healthy weight**Think about portion sizeEat more protein (to keep you fuller for longer and help with wound healing) |
| **Be more active** | **It is more dangerous to do nothing than to do something**Try a Joe Wicks [workout](https://cpoc.org.uk/news/joe-wicks-helps-people-get-fit-surgery)(Scan the QR code to find out more or visit our website: [www.cpoc.org.uk/joe-wicks](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/joe-wicks)) Get family involvedStart slowly and build upStop if you get chest pain, irregular heartbeat, dizziness, a sudden change in vision or are unwell with an infection |
| **Focus on wellbeing** | **Its usual to feel anxious or worried before surgery**Make time for what you enjoyGet outside, eat healthily, talk to othersBuild support networks with friends and family |

**Ask about the operation**

We want you to find out more to decide *if* the operation is the right choice for you. This [leaflet](https://cpoc.org.uk/sites/cpoc/files/documents/2020-05/CWUK_patient_leaflet_v6.1%20FINAL%20%281%29.pdf) on Make the most of your appointment can help you with what questions to ask, including

* What are the **benefits**?
* What are the **risks** (what might go wrong)?
* What are the **alternatives**?
* What if I **do** **nothing**?

Scan the QR code to find out more or view the information [here](https://bit.ly/CWUK_patients):

**Ask about what will happen *after* the operation**

We want you to find out more to decide *if* the operation is the right choice for you

* Will you go home the same day?
* If not, how long will you need to stay in hospital?
* How long will it take to get back to usual movement / thinking / feeling?
* Will there be any lasting change to your health or lifestyle?
* Are there any leaflets about what you can do now to prepare for the time after surgery?

**Think about practical things**

Before you have your pre-operative assessment think about the day of the operation

* How will you get to, and from, the hospital?
* Who can stay with you for 24 hours after (if you are likely to go home the same day)?
* Who can help support you when you leave hospital?
* Who can take over any caring duties for young children or elderly relatives?
* Who can help look after any pets?

If you have worries or concerns tell the hospital team

**Get ready for admission**

Remember to bring into hospital

* Your usual medicines (in the boxes)
* Comfy day clothes (so you can get dressed after the operation)
* Sensible slippers or shoes with a back (so you can move around after the operation)
* Books, music (and headphones) or puzzle books (to pass the time)

**Get ready for life after the operation**

Here are some ways you can get ready *now* for life after the operation. Scan the QR code to find out more or view the information [here](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/practical-preparation):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Bathing and toileting** | Get flannels for a strip wash if you can’t get dressings wet Get plastic gloves to keep any dressings on your hands clean and dry |
| **Getting dressed** | Loose-fitting clothes can be easier to put on (and comfier) |
| **Moving around** | Remove rugs, mats and cables you could trip overGet a flask to safely carry hot drinksA rucksack or shoulder bag can help with carrying items between roomsUse a night light in case you get up overnight |
| **Shopping**  | Fill freezer and cupboards with easy meals Ask if family, friends or neighbours can help with shopping after the operationTry ordering a delivery onlineBuy long life milk and freeze bread |
| **Preparing drinks and meals** | Put the teabags by the kettleMove pots and pans so you don’t need to bend or stretchBatch cook for the freezerPlan simple meals |
| **Housework** | Ask friends and family to help or think about a cleaner for a few daysIt’s okay to lower your standards while you recover |
| **Transport** | Find bus timetables or phone numbers for taxi services if you won’t be able to drive |

**When you’ve had your operation**

**Get DrEaMing**

DrEaMing (drinking, eating and moving) soon after your operation:

* helps stop problems
* gets you home sooner

The ward staff will:

* tell you when you can eat and drink after the operation
* tell you if there is anything you shouldn’t eat yet
* show you how to safely move around
* encourage you to breathe deeply to reduce chance of chest infection

**Talk about worries**

Getting back to usual after the operation needs your involvement. Some patients find this positive, but others feel vulnerable.

The ward team can reassure you about how much you can be doing. Start small and build up slowly.

**Think about when you go home**

Spending time in hospital, mostly in bed can

* lead to loss of muscle strength
* mean you are less able to do daily tasks

This can change how you will cope when you go home.

To help stop this happening (and get you back to usual as soon as possible), if your team agree:

* Sit in a chair for meals
* Walk to the bathroom
* Get dressed in day clothes
* Keep busy by reading a book or doing puzzles

**Getting closer to going home**

**Ask about what happens next**

* What do you need to do before you can go home?
* What happens if you can’t do what is needed to go home?

**Think about managing when you get home**

Think ahead to how you will manage when you get home, particularly if you will be on your own for large parts of the day

Scan the QR code to find out more or view the information [here](https://www.cpoc.org.uk/guidelines-and-resources/perioperative-optimisation-Top-seven-interventions/practical-preparation): 

**Leaving hospital**

**Ask about recovery**

Before you leave hospital you might want to ask the surgical, physiotherapy or nursing staff:

* ****How long would it usually take to get back to usual? (Scan the QR code to find more information for some operations or view the information [here](https://bit.ly/recovering-surgery))
* What can you do to help with your recovery?
* Is there anything you shouldn’t do yet (e.g., driving, flying, heavy lifting)?
* When might you be able to return to work? (you will need a fit note for your employer)

**Ask about practical things**

Before you leave hospital you might want to ask the surgical or nursing staff:

* If there are any foods you shouldn’t eat?
* How to look after your wound and your dressing
* How to look after any catheters, drains, stomas, or feeding tubes (if relevant)

**Ask about medicines**

Before you leave hospital you might have questions about your medicines. The surgical or pharmacy staff can answer these questions.

Common questions are included below:

* Are there any changes to your medicines?
* If so, are they short-term or long-term?
* How long do they think you will need to take painkillers?
* How can you reduce your painkillers as you get better?
* Scan the QR code for some more questions to ask or view the information [here](https://bit.ly/medicines_safety_check):

**Ask about problems with recovery**

Before you leave hospital you might want to speak to the surgical or nursing staff about the below:

* How would you know if there was a problem with your recovery?
* What to do if you think there is a problem

**Think about getting home**

* Have you got a door key?
* Who can come and collect you from hospital?

These tips might help if you are worried about getting into a car:

* Ask the driver to park somewhere you don’t need to step down from a kerb
* Slide the passenger seat back as far as possible
* Tilt the seat back to give more space
* Hold the outside of the door and lower yourself down onto the seat
* Swing your legs around into the foot well
* Some people find moving easier if they sit on a plastic bag

Scan the QR code for more information or view the information [here](https://bit.ly/getting-into-car):

**Pace yourself!**

Depending on what operation you have recovery might take many weeks.

It is usual to have good days and bad days.

Set yourself small daily goals but be careful not to tire yourself out.

**Keep going with any lifestyle changes**

Keep going with any lifestyle changes you made before the operation, for example, those below.

* Stopping smoking
* Reducing alcohol
* Losing weight or improving what you eat
* Being more active
* Building support networks
* Looking after other health problems

These are still important for your recovery and for your future health

**Use this blank checklist to write down things you need to remember**

Disclaimer

We try very hard to keep the information in this leaflet accurate and up to date, but we cannot guarantee this. We don’t expect this general information to cover all the questions that you might have or to deal with everything that might be important to you. You should discuss your choices and any worries that you have with your medical team, using this leaflet as a guide. The leaflet on its own should not be treated as advice. It cannot be used for any commercial or business purpose.

Information for healthcare professionals on printing this leaflet. Please consider the visual impairments of patients when printing or photocopying this leaflet. Photocopies of photocopies are discouraged because these tend to be low-quality prints and can be very difficult for patients to read. Please also make sure that you use the latest version of this leaflet, which is available on the CPOC website.

If you have any general comments, please email them to: cpoc@rcoa.ac.uk

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This leaflet will be reviewed within three years of the date of publication.

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