



Centre for  
Perioperative Care



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: [www.cpoc.org.uk/patients](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 now ([www.rcoa.ac.uk/fitterbettersooner](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/fitterbettersooner)) so you recover better if you decide to have an operation.

- Stop smoking.
- Reduce alcohol.
- Lose weight or improve what you eat.
- Be more active.
- Focus on wellbeing.

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

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



|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Stop smoking                        | <p>Stopping smoking lowers the risk of problems after surgery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Contact a stop smoking scheme for help.</li><li>■ Set a quit date.</li><li>■ Ask family and friends to support you.</li></ul>   |
| Reduce alcohol                      | <p>Try to stick to recommended limits (14 units per week)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Have alcohol free days.</li><li>■ Try alcohol free options.</li><li>■ Change your activities to avoid triggers.</li></ul>   |
| Lose weight or improve what you eat | <p>Work towards being a healthy weight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Think about portion size.</li><li>■ Eat more protein (to keep you fuller for longer and help with wound healing).</li></ul>  |
| Be more active                      | <p>It is more dangerous to do nothing than to do something</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Try a Joe Wicks workout (scan the QR code to find out more or visit our website: <a href="http://www.cpoc.org.uk/joe-wicks">www.cpoc.org.uk/joe-wicks</a>).</li><li>■ Get family involved.</li><li>■ Start slowly and build up.</li><li>■ Stop if you get chest pain, irregular heartbeat, dizziness, a sudden change in vision or are unwell with an infection.</li></ul> |
| Focus on wellbeing                  | <p>It's usual to feel anxious or worried before surgery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Make time for what you enjoy.</li><li>■ Get outside, eat healthily, talk to others.</li><li>■ Build support networks with friends and family.</li></ul>   |

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

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### Ask about the operation

We want you to find out more to decide if the operation is the right choice for you. This leaflet 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](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 preoperative 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).

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

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### 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:

[www.cpoc.org.uk/practical-preparation](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/practical-preparation).



|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Bathing and toileting      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Get flannels for a strip wash if you can't get dressings wet.</li><li>■ Get plastic gloves to keep any dressings on your hands clean and dry.</li></ul>  |
| Getting dressed            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Loose-fitting clothes can be easier to put on (and comfier).</li></ul>   |
| Moving around              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Remove rugs, mats and cables you could trip over.</li><li>■ Get a flask to safely carry hot drinks.</li><li>■ A rucksack or shoulder bag can help with carrying items between rooms.</li><li>■ Use a night light in case you get up overnight.</li></ul> |
| Shopping                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Fill freezer and cupboards with easy meals.</li><li>■ Ask if family, friends or neighbours can help with shopping after the operation.</li><li>■ Try ordering a delivery online.</li><li>■ Buy long life milk and freeze bread.</li></ul>                |
| Preparing drinks and meals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Put the teabags by the kettle.</li><li>■ Move pots and pans so you don't need to bend or stretch.</li><li>■ Batch cook for the freezer.</li><li>■ Plan simple meals.</li></ul>   |
| Housework                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Ask friends and family to help or think about a cleaner for a few days.</li><li>■ It's okay to lower your standards while you recover.</li></ul>   |
| Transport                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Find bus timetables or telephone numbers for taxi services if you won't be able to drive.</li></ul>  |

## 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:

[www.cpoc.org.uk/practical-preparation](http://www.cpoc.org.uk/practical-preparation).



## Leaving hospital

Ask about recovery

Before you leave hospital you might want to speak to the surgical, physiotherapy or nursing staff.

- How long it 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, for example, 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).

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### 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](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>.



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

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## 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 |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
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## What to ask, think about, and do, if you might be having an operation

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### 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. This 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](mailto:cpoc@rcoa.ac.uk).

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