

Preparing for Surgery

Patient Education Resource

Proper preparation can make a real difference in your surgical experience and recovery. This guide covers what to expect in the days leading up to your operation and how to set yourself up for the smoothest recovery possible.

1. Pre-Operative Instructions

- Attend all pre-operative appointments, including lab work, imaging, and anesthesia evaluation
- Complete any required testing (blood work, EKG, chest X-ray) as directed by your surgeon's office
- Notify your surgical team of any changes in your health — new cough, fever, infection, or skin rash
- Stop smoking at least 4 weeks before surgery if possible; smoking delays wound healing and increases complications
- Follow bowel preparation instructions exactly if prescribed (commonly required for colorectal procedures)
- Shower with antibacterial soap (chlorhexidine) the evening before and morning of surgery

2. Medication Guidance

Your surgical team will provide specific instructions about your medications. General guidelines:

- **Blood thinners** (warfarin, apixaban, clopidogrel, aspirin): Your surgeon will tell you exactly when to stop — typically 5–7 days before surgery. Do not stop or restart without their direction.
- **Diabetes medications:** You may need to adjust doses the day before and morning of surgery. Bring your glucose monitor to the hospital.
- **Blood pressure and heart medications:** Usually taken the morning of surgery with a small sip of water — confirm with your team.
- **Herbal supplements and vitamins:** Stop all herbal supplements (fish oil, vitamin E, garlic, ginkgo, turmeric) at least 7–10 days before surgery, as many increase bleeding risk.
- **Over-the-counter pain relievers:** Avoid ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve) for 7 days before surgery. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is usually acceptable — confirm with your team.

Important: Bring a complete, up-to-date medication list (including doses) to every appointment and on surgery day.

3. Fasting Rules

An empty stomach is essential for safe anesthesia. Follow these guidelines unless your team provides different instructions:

- **No solid food** for at least 8 hours before your scheduled surgery time
- **Clear liquids only** (water, black coffee, apple juice, clear broth) up to 2 hours before arrival — then nothing by mouth
- **No gum or candy** the morning of surgery
- If you are on a bowel preparation, follow the specific timing and liquid instructions provided
- Take approved morning medications with a small sip of water only

Note: If you eat or drink outside of these guidelines, your surgery may need to be postponed for safety.

4. What to Bring on Surgery Day

Do bring:

- Photo ID and insurance card
- Complete medication list with doses
- Advance directive / power of attorney documents (if applicable)
- CPAP machine if you use one for sleep apnea
- Comfortable, loose-fitting clothes for discharge (front-opening shirts are helpful for abdominal surgery)
- Slip-on shoes (avoid bending to tie laces after surgery)
- Phone charger
- A supportive person to drive you home and stay with you the first night

Leave at home:

- Jewelry, watches, and valuables
- Contact lenses (wear glasses instead)
- Large amounts of cash

5. Preparing Your Home for Recovery

Setting up your home before surgery reduces stress and helps you focus on healing:

- **Stock your kitchen:** Easy-to-prepare meals, soups, crackers, protein shakes, electrolyte drinks, and plenty of water
- **Set up a recovery area:** A comfortable chair or bed with pillows within easy reach of a bathroom. A small table for medications, water, phone, and remote.
- **Remove tripping hazards:** Secure loose rugs, clear clutter from hallways, and ensure good lighting — especially along nighttime paths to the bathroom
- **Place essentials at waist height:** Avoid bending or reaching overhead for the first 2–4 weeks
- **Arrange help:** Have someone available to assist with meals, laundry, driving, and errands for at least the first 1–2 weeks
- **Pets:** Arrange care for pets that may jump on you or require lifting

- **Prescriptions:** Fill post-surgical prescriptions before surgery day if possible

This resource is for educational purposes only and does not replace individualized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions provided by your surgical team.