

# healthsmart!

## Have a Positive Surgical Experience

Any surgical procedure carries an element of risk, but a growing emphasis around the country on patient safety is making a difference. Better surgical instruments, improved surgical know-how and advanced anesthesiology techniques are making surgery safer. The information and advice that follows can make your surgery experience even safer and more comfortable.

### Before surgery

#### Choose the best surgery for you

All surgical procedures are not the same. Talk to your surgeon about the risks of having surgery. Ask about the benefits you can expect if you do have surgery. Ask about options and alternatives, such as the possible outcome of not having surgery or other treatments instead of surgery. There are two basic kinds of surgery.

- Open surgery requires a relatively large incision. Some procedures, such as the removal of a large mass or organ or the insertion of an organ, can only be done through open surgery.
- Minimally invasive surgery uses a number of relatively small incisions. Patients tend to recover more quickly from minimally invasive surgery than open surgery. In these operations, the surgeon uses a tiny video camera and small tools to fit within the incisions. Sometimes surgeons use a robot such as the da Vinci surgical system for certain procedures.

### Become part of your health care team

#### Ask questions

- Is there an alternative to surgery?
- Is there a newer way to perform the operation, and what are the pros and cons of each approach?
- How long is the operation expected to take?
- Will I be admitted to a hospital and how long might I stay?
- What are the risks of the operation?
- What are the possible complications?
- What is the recovery time once I am at home and before I go back to work or resume normal activities?
- How many times have you performed this exact operation?

#### Share information

Let your doctor know about:

- Allergies, bad drug reactions or bad drug interactions that you have experienced.
- Any bad experience you have had with surgery in the past.

#### Work with your anesthesiologist

While any anesthesia carries some risk, the drugs and techniques used today are safer than they've ever been. Technological advances are giving anesthesiologists quicker access to information

about satisfactory ventilation and appropriate level of anesthesia. You can help by providing complete information about your medical history.

- Talk to your anesthesiologist before the surgery about any concerns you have. Anything you say is confidential, and the information you provide may affect important decisions made in administering your anesthesia.
- Make sure you understand what your anesthesiologist will do. Ask about the type of anesthesia you will have. Ask whether you will be asleep (general anesthesia), be awake but sedated, or will have a “local” anesthesia such as a nerve or spinal block.
- Bring a list of your allergies and medicines, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, nutritional supplements, vitamins and herbal products whenever you visit your physician or the hospital.
- Remember to mention tobacco and alcohol use. If you use drugs not prescribed by a physician mention this, even common drugs such as aspirin. This information is confidential. It is important because these types of drugs affect your body in ways that doctor-prescribed medications do not. Knowing that you take these drugs is important to the doctor planning your care, such as the type of anesthesia to use and post-operative pain medication.
- If you have had surgery before, tell your anesthesiologist about your post-anesthesia experience.
- Ask about when you should stop taking aspirin and blood thinners.

### **Speak up about herbal supplements**

Anesthesiologists and surgeons have reported significant changes in heart rate or blood pressure and improper clotting of blood in some patients who take certain herbal products. You may be asked to stop taking certain prescribed medications or some herbal products before surgery so they will be cleared from your body. Beware of even the most popular herbs. Tell your doctors if you are taking any herbal products. For example:

- St. John’s wort may prolong or intensify the effects of some narcotic drugs and anesthetic agents.
- Ginko biloba may interfere with blood clotting.
- Ginseng is associated with episodes of high blood pressure and rapid heart beat.

## **The day of surgery**

### **Identifying you: the patient**

- Examine your armband to make sure your full name and date of birth are correct. Contact a health care provider IMMEDIATELY if your name is misspelled, your birth date is wrong or if you notice anything else on the armband that is incorrect.
- Expect various members of your health care team to check your name, date of birth, and the medical record number on your ID band to make sure they are giving the right treatment to the right patient.
- Hold your armband out for inspection as a reminder to any physician or staff member with whom you come in contact. Insist that the band be replaced if it is removed for an IV or other reasons.
- Make sure each health care provider or transporter either asks you to tell them your name and date of birth or reads it aloud from your armband before they give you advice, medications or treatments, or take you away from your room for a procedure or X-ray.

### **Marking the surgical site**

- When possible, make sure you and your surgeon agree prior to surgery on what will be done during the operation.
- Make sure the consent form you sign for surgery states exactly what surgery you are having and the location of the surgery on your body, such as your right arm or left leg.
- You and your nurse or physician will mark your surgical site with a permanent marker before you go into the operating room.

## **Additional information**

UK HealthCare also offers other *HealthSmart!* fact sheets that may be of interest if you are facing surgery or anticipating a hospital stay. Call 859-257-1000 or toll free 1-800-333-8874 for a free copy of “Patient Safety: Stay Safe in the Hospital,” “How to Avoid Medication Errors,” or “Multiple Medical Problems.” Information is also available from:

- The American College of Surgeons (ACS)—Free series of pamphlets on “When You Need an Operation.” Online

at [www.facs.org/public\\_info/operation/wnao.html](http://www.facs.org/public_info/operation/wnao.html), or write to the ACS, Office of Public Information, 633 N. Saint Clair St., Chicago, IL 60611.

- American Society of Anesthesiologist (ASA) or the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA)—Free booklets on what you should know about anesthesia. Write to the ASA at 520 North Northwest Highway, Park Ridge, IL 60068-2573, or call 847-825-5586; or AANA at 222 S. Prospect Avenue, Park Ridge, IL 60068-4001 or call 847-692-7050.

UK HealthCare would like to acknowledge that some of the material in this fact sheet came from the American College of Surgeons, the National Patient Safety Foundation and the Joint Commission.

## Health information

In need of health information? We can help.

At UK HealthCare, it's part of our mission to be Kentucky's health information resource. Our goal is to give you information on wellness practices, illnesses and treatments, and health consumer issues so that you can live your healthiest life possible and make the best possible health care decisions.

Information on a wide variety of health topics can be found on our Web site, and printed versions may be requested by calling UK Health Connection, **257-1000** or **1-800-333-8874**.

## Publications

Here are just a few publications that are available:

### ***Advances & Insights***

*Advances & Insights* is a series that highlights a recent medical discovery or development and provides the insights of a UK HealthCare expert. Issues are available in the following categories:

Women's Health  
Cancer  
General Health  
Pediatrics  
Heart Health  
Neurosciences

## Tips for a satisfactory hospital experience

- Learn the names of your nurses, physician and other key hospital workers.
- Keep a diary of what happens, who comes in and what they say.
- Keep a list of questions for your doctors.
- Ask your nurses and doctors to give you information on your medical problem or procedure. Ask your family members to visit the hospital's library for information on your medical condition.
- If you smoke, ask to be given something to reduce your desire to smoke.
- Never smoke in the hospital as oxygen is in use!
- Have your nurse show you how your bed works so you can make adjustments yourself.
- Leave valuables at home or ask to put them in a safe.
- Provide information on how to contact the family member or friend who is acting as your primary advocate.
- Chaplains are available to all faiths or to any patient who just wants to talk.
- Have any allergies written and taped to your gown to alert the staff.

### ***HealthSmart!***

We also produce ***HealthSmart!*** a series of publications designed to help you be a good health care consumer and get the most out of the health care system.

***HealthSmart!*** topics include:

Genetic Counseling and Testing  
Preventing and Solving Medical Billing Problems  
Managing Multiple Medical Problems  
Patient Safety (Adult)  
Pediatric Patient Safety  
How to Avoid Medication Errors  
Getting a Good Second Opinion  
Protecting Yourself Against Identity Theft

New topics are added all the time. Individual issues of all of our publications can be found online at **[ukhealthcare.uky.edu/publications](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/publications)**.

Want to make sure you never miss a new one? Sign up for a subscription on the Web site or by calling UK Health Connection.

### *On the Web*

Extensive information on various illnesses, conditions and treatment methods can be found on our Web site, **ukhealthcare.uky.edu**. From the home page, select the box on the left-hand side labeled “Need health information?” and select “Illnesses and Conditions” from the drop-down menu.

### *Health\*Click*

Visit our Web site, **ukhealthcare.uky.edu** to subscribe to our Health\*Click service, which allows you to receive notification of new publications as well as special events in areas that interest you.

8-356

Call UK Health Connection at (859) 257-1000 or toll free (800) 333-8874 to make an appointment or request a referral. Visit us online at [www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu](http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu).

**UK**HealthCare