

Your Surgery

*****Your Surgery (Part 1): How to Prepare*****

Narrator

Surgery. While 15-million Americans undergo some type of surgery each year, the mere thought of it can be intimidating.

Dr. Julie Freed

Surgery can be incredibly anxiety-provoking, especially when it's new and you don't know what to expect.

Dr. John Kroner

I often tell them my definition of "minor surgery" is it's happening to somebody else. You know, if it's happening to you, it's not a minor thing. They have to trust you. Taking the time to prepare and learn about your procedure is the best way to put your mind at ease and help insure a positive outcome.

Martha Moore, Patient

You don't want any surprises, but I can't control that. What I can control is how I'm prepared.

Narrator

With a degenerative condition, Martha Moore knew hip replacement surgery was in her future. So she made it her mission to learn all she could about her surgeon and the procedure well in advance.

Martha Moore, Patient

I'm knowledgeable about the surgery, I've done everything I can do, I've prepared my home, I have the right equipment, I have friends and family looking out for me. So I have peace of mind.

Dr. John Kroner

A lot of people, having a knowledge about what to expect at every turn, alleviates a lot of their concern and apprehension about going ahead with it.

Narrator

For Martha, finding a qualified surgeon with solid credentials and recommendations was key. So was being a good advocate for herself.

Martha Moore, Patient

I came prepared with questions: How long would I be off work? Would I expect a hospital stay? And then to be at home, physical therapy? He answered all my questions and then some.

Dr. Julie Freed

We don't want to create anxiety in a situation, and it just kind of makes the process safer. And they know more what to expect.

Dr. John Kroner

Having a very apprehensive patient is difficult in a lot of different ways. So any way that you can alleviate that apprehension, and most of the time that is with information, the better off you'll both be, the doctor and the patient.

Martha Moore, Patient

Preparation is I think 90% of it. Following the directions of the doctor and hospital pre-surgery I think sets you up for success post-surgery. You go in prepared. I feel I'm that much stronger and hopefully my recovery will be that much quicker because of that.

Narrator

Surgeon John Kroner also offers this advice to patients:

Dr. John Kroner

The best way to have a good, healthy recovery from surgery is to be good and healthy before your surgery.

Narrator

If you smoke, Kroner says, cut back or quit, and follow any exercise regimen your surgeon may have recommended. As you get closer to the date of surgery, you may be asked to wash with anti-bacterial soap to reduce the risk of infection. You'll also be instructed not to eat or drink anything at least 8 hours before surgery. This is critical.

Dr. Julie Freed

If we're inducing you or basically putting you under anesthesia and there's food or particulate in your stomach and we're placing a breathing tube, that food can actually come up and end up in your lungs. And if it goes into your lungs, you can end up with pretty bad respiratory infection.

Narrator

Your doctor will also want to review all your medications, both prescription and over the counter, before surgery.

Dr. Julie Freed

There are certain medications we need you to stop prior to surgery, and there's definitely medications that we want you to continue taking prior to surgery and that can be very important.

Narrator

Expect to hear from the hospital before you go in for your procedure.

Nurse Johnson

They may be asking you information about your insurance coverage, questions about your medical history, other procedures you've had done, who are your physicians, what medications do you take, and who are family members that may be with you during surgery, or what's your home situation based on after you have surgery.

Narrator

It may seem like a lot of questions, and that you've answered them many times before. But rest assured, the hospital and the medical team have your best interest in mind.

Dr. Julie Freed

Everyone is different and everyone has different medical conditions, and everyone may respond to anesthesia and surgery differently. So we're trained to look through the medical records, look at those medical conditions and then decide what medications to give you and, more importantly, how to monitor you and keep you safe.

Narrator

To learn more about what to expect in surgery, watch "Your Surgery: What to Expect at the Hospital".

*****Your Surgery (Part 2): What to Expect at the Hospital*****

Narrator

It's surgery day, and Martha Moore is prepared. Before heading out the door, she consults her checklist of what to do and what to bring: comfortable clothes, no valuables.

Martha Moore, Patient

Just load me up in the car.

Narrator

Martha's sister is taking her to the hospital. More than just as her driver, though. She'll be there throughout the surgery if any questions arise.

Martha Moore, Patient

My sister will be my advocate, I know she'll have my back with anything that comes up with my surgery.

Dr. John Kroner

I think that is helpful to the healing process to have, it doesn't have to be family, but some caring person that can be with you when the medical team is not with you. It's a much more comfortable situation for doctors and the patient, I think.

Narrator

At the hospital, the first stop is admitting.

Nurse Johnson

They're going to ask you for a copy of your I.D., they're going to ask you for a copy of your insurance card, and they will probably have you sign some general admission papers for the hospital.

Narrator

Most facilities now will also ask you if you have a power of attorney or living will just in case something were to ever happen to you that everybody would like to know what your wishes are. Then you'll be taken to a room to prepare for surgery. Here Martha is asked to fill out more paperwork. It's another chance for her to ask questions, as well as answer more questions from the medical staff.

Nurse Johnson

They'll confirm your name, they'll confirm what you're having done, they'll confirm if you have any allergies, and if you're having a procedure that is sided meaning right or left.

Narrator

In fact, expect to answer many of those same questions each time you encounter new hospital personnel. It's all part of protecting your best interests.

Nurse Johnson

We want to make sure that we're doing surgery on the right spot, on the right side your body, and it's the right procedure. We're not trying to make you angry, we're just trying to make you safe.

Narrator

You'll also be asked to sign a form agreeing to the procedure; it's called informed consent.

Dr. John Kroner

There is a legal obligation, for a patient to be informed of the, not every possible risk that could happen, but the ones that are particularly appropriate for whatever procedure they're having done.

Narrator

In your room, before you're taken to the pre-op area, there might also be a few final preparations.

Nurse Johnson

They may, for your surgical procedure, shave you, they may wash you, they may prep your skin with different products, you may have an IV inserted, you may have an antibiotic started, based on the procedure you're having done, you may or may not receive some sedation.

Narrator

Then it's off to pre-op where you'll likely meet the anesthesiologist. This is a good time to ask any questions about the type of anesthesia you'll be receiving.

Nurse Johnson

What are the options you have, what are the benefits, what are the complications of any of those type anesthetics so that you make an informed decision with that caregiver about what you want to do before you have your surgery.

Dr. Julie Freed

The type of anesthesia you receive really depends on a couple of things, the type of operation you're having and really, your health.

Dr. John Kroner

There's local anesthesia, where you just inject Novocain around the area where you're going to make the incision. And then there's regional anesthesia where you can numb a whole limb or the whole lower part of the body. And then there's IV sedation, which a lot of people refer to as "twilight sleep" or you're sedated but you're not technically under general anesthesia. And then there's general anesthesia.

Dr. Julie Freed

That's when you are completely asleep. But it's a little more than just the sleep, right? We can't shake you and wake you up. And we have to place a breathing tube, in that sort of situation, too, to help you through the operation.

Narrator

In the operating room, several measures will be taken to monitor your vital signs throughout the operation.

Dr. Julie Freed

It's our job to monitor everything: your breathing, your heartrate, your blood pressure, your kidney function, your brain function. The important thing to know is just that an anesthesiologist is there to take care of you and we're going to see you from the beginning to end of that operation, and we'll be with you that entire time.

Narrator

After surgery you'll be taken to the recovery room where you'll be monitored while you wake up, which generally takes between 30 minutes and 2 hours.

Nurse Johnson

We are going to make sure that you receive pain medication, make sure if you're a little sick to your stomach you receive medication to prevent nausea or vomiting, and then basically just let you wake up. There's a nurse with you at all times. You may or may not have oxygen on your face and you will still have monitors on you that you'll hear beeping. Nothing to be concerned about, this is normal procedure for everyone.

Narrator

The type of surgery you have as well as your general health will determine whether you are admitted to the hospital after surgery or allowed to go home. In Martha's case, she's going to need a couple of days at the hospital to recover.

To learn more about recovery after surgery, watch “Your Surgery: Recovery”.

*******Your Surgery (Part 3): Recovery*******

Narrator

The type of surgery you’ve had will determine when you can go home as well as how to care for yourself when you get there. Your doctor will give you instructions specific to your surgery, but there are some general guidelines to consider.

Dr. John Kroner

What determines whether you go home after the procedure or not is whether you’re going to be safe being at home after the procedure. That’s determined by how much the procedure is going to affect your mobility or your awareness.

Narrator

Prepared for a lack of mobility after her hip surgery, Martha Moore took her surgeon’s advice and lined up people to help her once she got home.

Martha Moore, Patient

I have people watering, cutting my grass, bringing me meals, staying with me. You need to ask people to be part of this process because you can’t do it alone.

Narrator

You should also rest for at least the first 24 hours after surgery, and then limit your activity for several days. Your surgeon will tell you when you can resume any exercise or vigorous activity. The bottom line is take it slow. Allow your body to heal.

Martha Moore, Patient

Being able to walk to the grocery store or a department store or just to get things done around the house. It was very limiting so I’m looking forward to having this taken care of and resuming a normal life.

Narrator

Controlling pain and staying ahead of it is important after any surgery. Take your pain medications as prescribed. Never take more without consulting your surgeon.

Dr. John Kroner

After any surgical procedure, the patient should have control of that pain. Not total absence of pain, but at a tolerable level. We’ve got a good idea by the time they’re going home what their requirements are and then we send them home on the same thing that’s working for them here with the idea that they’ll gradually taper off of that.

Narrator

Your surgeon may also recommend other ways to relieve pain; perhaps elevating an affected arm or leg to relieve swelling, or applying ice, for example. Always follow their instructions.

The same is true for antibiotics which protect against infection. If your surgeon prescribed them, take them until they are completely gone. Don’t stop, even if you’re feeling better.

Speaking of infection, be on the lookout for any possible signs that something's not quite right. These signs could include:

- Increased redness or tenderness around your surgical wound
- Red streaks or pus
- Fever

Also, watch for any allergic reaction to medicines you may be taking. This might include itching, redness or a rash, shortness of breath, or wheezing. Blood clots are another concern after surgery.

Dr. John Kroner

Signs of a blood clot unfortunately are oftentimes not very noticeable. But swelling or pain in an area of the limb that wasn't operated on can be a sign of that, or certainly any difficulty breathing or pain in the chest or things like that.

Narrator

If you're experiencing any possible signs of infection, of allergic reactions, of blood clots, call your healthcare provider immediately.

Dr. John Kroner

Whenever I do surgery, the patient is given two numbers when they leave. The number of the nursing station at the hospital that they had the surgery performed at, and our office number. And there is somebody available 24/7 at both of those numbers. So, they have access to information if they're having a problem.

Narrator

Preparing well for surgery and following the advice of her healthcare providers is paying off for Martha. She's back at work, enjoying the newfound mobility that her hip surgery provided.

Martha Moore, Patient

I think knowledge also helps you be an advocate for yourself and that's as important as anything else. So you know the questions to ask, you come prepared, and you get the answers you need.