

Your Surgery: What to Expect at the Hospital

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.

"Just load me up in the car."

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.

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

"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."

At the hospital, the first stop is admitting.

"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."

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.

"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."

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.

"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."

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

"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."

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

"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."

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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.

"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."

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

"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."

"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."

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

"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."

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.

"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."

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.