

Informed Consent: What Is It?

Before a medical treatment, test, procedure, or surgery, you or someone you care for will go through a process called "informed consent."

At first, it may just seem like a bunch of papers you will need to sign.

But it's more than just paperwork. It is your opportunity—your right— as a patient to understand all of your options for having or not having health care such as a treatment, medicines, and tests.

It also includes knowing what you might do instead.

For example, let's say your doctor has recommended a surgery for your knee.

When you are "informed" about the knee surgery, you understand what you could expect if you have the surgery.

You also are "informed" about what might happen if you don't— and what you may expect if you decide to do something other than have surgery.

Informed consent means that you've been informed—or told—what your options are before you agree—or consent—to any treatment.

Informed consent includes the conversations you have with your doctor about your options and the risks, benefits, and expected results of any treatment, medicine, or test.

This also lets you be involved in your own care.

This way, you can get the care that's right for you based on your values and what's important to you.

To get you started, here are three things that can help you get the information you need so you can confidently give your consent.

One: Ask as many questions as you have.

Your doctor wants you to be as comfortable and as ready as you can be before you get any type of treatment, test, or medicine.

You can ask why you need this type of care. You can talk about costs.

You can also ask what would happen if you waited or didn't do anything.

Two: Talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of your treatment.

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For example, you can talk about the risks of a surgery or ask, "What's the benefit of this medicine?"

Three: Think about your options.

Unless the care you need is urgent, you'll have time to think about your options.

It's important that you feel comfortable with and understand your care choices.

Some people feel nervous or stressed talking to their doctor.

Depending on your doctor, you also might be able to send a message or email through your electronic medical record.

Or if you need support during an appointment, ask someone you trust to be with you to help with questions, remember details, and write down any of the doctor's answers.

Informed consent is about more than signing papers.

It's about understanding your options and partnering with your doctor to help you feel more confident about the health care choices that are right for you.

Informed consent: It's your right to know more.