

# Informed Consent

Before having your operation, you will be asked to indicate that you understand the nature of the surgical procedure to be performed and that you give your permission for the operation.

This may appear to be a formality, but, in fact, this process should be taken very seriously. Before your operation, frankly discuss with your surgeon any questions or concerns that you have. Of course, not everyone wants to know all the specific details of the surgical procedure itself, but you should seek the answers to questions such as:

- What are the indications that have led your doctor to the opinion that an operation is necessary?
- What, if any, alternative treatments are available for your condition?
- What will be the likely result if you don't have the operation?
- What are the basic procedures involved in the operation?
- What are the risks?
- How is the operation expected to improve your health or quality of life?
- Is hospitalization necessary and, if so, how long can you expect to be hospitalized?
- What can you expect during your recovery period?
- When can you expect to resume normal activities?
- Are there likely to be residual effects from the operation?

Of course, your surgeon may volunteer much of this information. However, if you still have questions, don't hesitate to ask. Remember, the operation is being performed on you, and you should seek any information that you need to improve your understanding. Your doctor should be willing to take whatever time is necessary to make sure that you are fully informed. No doctor can, or should, guarantee outcomes, because each operation is different, depending upon the individual condition and response of each patient.

Nonetheless, your surgeon will be able to give you a good idea of what to expect.

The principle of informed consent is endorsed by the American College of Surgeons, the largest organization of surgeons in the world with more than 54,000 members. The Statements on Principles of the College says, in part, "Patients should understand the indications for the operation, the risk involved, and the result that it is hoped to attain."

## Surgery by Surgeons

A fully trained surgeon is a physician who, after medical school, has gone through years of training in an accredited residency program to learn the specialized skills of a surgeon. One good sign of a surgeon's competence is certification by a national surgical board approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties. All board-certified surgeons have satisfactorily completed an approved residency training program and have passed a rigorous specialty examination.

*Prepared as a public service by the American College of Surgeons.*

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