

Seeking a Consultation

There are no hard-and-fast rules to tell you when consultation (or second opinion) is needed, but before you agree to an operation, you should discuss the following questions with your surgeon:

What are the indications for the operation?

- What, if any, alternative forms of treatment are available?
- What will be the likely result if you don't have the operation?
- What are the risks?
- How is the operation expected to improve your health or quality of life?
- Are there likely to be residual effects from the operation?

If, after discussing these questions with your surgeon, you feel confident that a surgical procedure is the best treatment for your condition, you probably don't need a second opinion. If, however, you have doubts about whether the operation should be performed, or if the doctor recommending the operation is not a qualified surgeon, you may want to seek consultation.

Consultation has always been a part of good medical practice, and a competent physician should not be insulted if you decide to get further advice. If you do want a second opinion, here are some things to remember:

Seek Qualified Advice

A consultation is not worth much unless it is given by someone with the knowledge of and expertise in treating your condition. Always seek consultation from a surgeon who is a qualified surgical specialist. A good way to judge a surgeon's qualifications is to find out if he or she is certified by a surgical board that is approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties. By choosing a consultant who is board certified in the appropriate surgical specialty, you know that she has completed years of residency training and practice in her specialty and has demonstrated her competence by successfully completing a rigorous examination.

And, if the surgeon is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons (F.A.C.S.), you will know that he has passed a thorough evaluation of both professional competence and ethical fitness. Fellows are board-certified surgeons, or, in unusual circumstances, have met other standards comparable to those of board certification.

If you are unsure of a surgeon's qualifications, contact your family doctor, your local or state medical society, the hospital where the surgeon practices, or the surgical department of the nearest medical school. They should be able to tell you if your surgeon is board certified and/or a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

The Decision Is Yours

Remember, a second opinion is not necessarily better than a first opinion and, whether there is agreement or disagreement, the final decision will be yours. It's a decision that should be made with all the facts, so don't hesitate to discuss with your surgeon any questions or concerns you may have.

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.

The letters F.A.C.S. (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons) after a surgeon's name are a further indication of a physician's qualifications. Surgeons who become Fellows of the College have passed a comprehensive evaluation of their surgical training and skills; they also have demonstrated their commitment to high standards of ethical conduct. This evaluation is conducted according to national standards that were established to ensure that patients receive the best possible surgical care.

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

American College of Surgeons

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