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## Medical procedures - non-surgical

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### Summary

- Non-surgical medical procedures are used to diagnose, measure or treat problems such as disease or injury.
  - All medical procedures have benefits, risks and possible side effects.
  - Always ask your doctor for further information on any recommended medical procedure.
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Non-surgical medical procedures are used to diagnose, measure, monitor or treat problems such as diseases or injuries that don't require surgery. They are generally not highly invasive and don't involve cutting. Non-surgical procedures are carried out by a health professional such as a physician, general practitioner (GP), diagnostician or nurse.

Knowing what to expect during and after a medical procedure can help you prepare, whether you go to hospital or to an outpatient clinic. All medical procedures have benefits, risks and possible side effects. Always ask your doctor for further information on any recommended procedure. If in doubt, seek a second opinion from another doctor.

### Different types of non-surgical medical procedures

Non-surgical procedures can be grouped into five broad classes:

- physical examination (propaedeutic procedures)
- tests, x-rays and scans (diagnostic procedures)
- treatments to repair the effects of injury, disease or malfunctions, including medicines, physical and radiation therapies (therapeutic procedures)
- allied health treatments to improve, maintain or restore a person's physical function (rehabilitative procedures)
- cosmetic procedures to improve a person's physical appearance for aesthetic reasons.

### Physical examination

Commonly known as a physical examination, propaedeutic procedures are basic hands-on methods used by a doctor to get a general sense of a person's health and wellbeing. Some examples include:

- looking at the person to check their appearance
- touching areas of the person's body (palpation) to check for abnormalities such as pain, tenderness, swelling, masses or lumps
- tapping areas of the person's body (percussion) to check for the absence or presence of air or liquid inside a body cavity
- listening to internal body sounds with a stethoscope (auscultation), such as the sounds made by the heart, lungs or abdominal organs
- taking note of the person's vital signs, such as temperature and blood pressure.

### Tests, x-rays and scans

Diagnostic procedures are tests that a doctor uses to help diagnose a person's medical problem or to measure the severity of the problem. The results of diagnostic procedures also help a doctor or other health professional to plan the best course of treatment.

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Many diagnostic procedures are available. Some examples include:

- **body fluid tests** – such as blood tests and urine tests
- **non-invasive scans** – such as x-ray examinations, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), ultrasound and computed tomography (CT)
- **electrographs** – a graph made by measuring electrical activity within the body. Examples include electrocardiography or ECG (heart) and electroencephalography or EEG (brain)
- **angiograms** – a type of special x-ray that involves an injection of a contrast dye to better define the blood vessels. Examples include coronary (heart) angiogram, cerebral (brain) angiogram and pulmonary (lung) angiogram
- **endoscopy** – a slender tube (endoscope) is inserted into the body, which allows the doctor to make a visual inspection. Examples of endoscopic procedures include colonoscopy (bowel), gastroscopy (stomach), cystoscopy (bladder), bronchoscopy (airways of the lung) and laparoscopy (abdomen).

Surgery may also be used as a diagnostic tool. For example, the operation called laparotomy involves opening the abdominal cavity to explore the organs for disease or injury.

## Therapies

Therapeutic procedures are treatments that a doctor or other health professional uses to help, improve, cure or restore function to a person. This may be to repair the effects of injury, disease or congenital malfunctions (birth defects). Non-surgical therapeutic procedures are generally less invasive than surgical options.

A vast array of treatments is available including:

- medicines
- physical therapies
- radiation therapies.

If non-surgical procedures cannot provide appropriate or effective treatment for a particular condition or injury, surgery may need to be considered.

## Rehabilitation procedures

Rehabilitation procedures are treatments that help to improve, maintain or restore a person's physical function. They are also known as 'allied health' therapies. Examples of health professionals who offer rehabilitative care include:

- physiotherapist
- speech pathologist
- dietitian
- occupational therapist
- vision loss occupational therapist.

## Cosmetic procedures

Non-surgical cosmetic procedures use many of the same techniques as therapeutic procedures, but the aim is to improve a person's physical appearance for aesthetic reasons. A person may choose to have cosmetic treatment (surgical or non-surgical) to improve their body image, self-esteem and psychological wellbeing. It is important to discuss benefits, risks and your expectations with your doctor before making a decision to go ahead with a cosmetic procedure.

## Techniques may have more than one purpose

Some medical treatments or techniques can be used for more than one purpose. For example, an endoscopy is the insertion of a viewing tube (called an endoscope) inside the body. The doctor may use an endoscopic procedure to make a diagnosis. They may take a sample of tissue (biopsy) for later analysis in a laboratory.

At other times, endoscopy is used to perform minimally invasive surgery – for example, a diseased organ (such as the gall bladder) may be removed. A doctor may use an endoscopic procedure to both diagnose and treat a condition during the same operation.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Hospital emergency department
- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Hospital social worker
- Victorian Department of Health Tel. 1300 253 942
- Community rehabilitation clinic

### **Things to remember**

- Non-surgical procedures are used to diagnose, measure or treat problems such as disease or injury.
- All medical procedures have benefits, risks and possible side effects.
- Always ask your doctor for further information on any recommended medical procedure.

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