
Surgery

Summary

- Generally speaking, surgery involves cutting or otherwise penetrating the body's tissues.
 - Ask your doctor or surgeon about the benefits, risks and possible side effects of surgery – if in doubt, seek a second opinion.
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Generally speaking, surgical procedures involve cutting or otherwise penetrating the body's tissues. There are many different types of surgery. All have benefits, risks and possible side effects.

Ask your doctor or surgeon for more information to help you decide about treatment. This is known as 'informed consent'. Your health professional has a duty to explain the kind of operation you will undergo and any other options that are available to you. They should also clearly explain about any dangers and risks. If in doubt, seek a second opinion.

The aim of surgery

Surgeries can be grouped according to their purpose. For example:

- **Diagnosis** – surgery can establish whether a person has a particular illness, disease or condition. Diagnostic surgery may be recommended when the person has signs that something may be wrong – for example, they may report unusual symptoms or have a positive test result. An example of diagnostic surgery is a breast lump biopsy.
- **Prevention** – the removal of tissue to stop a disease from happening. An example of this type of surgery is an operation to remove bowel polyps that may turn cancerous if left untreated. This type of surgery is also called prophylactic surgery.
- **Ablation** – means the surgical destruction (ablation) of tissue.
- **Reconstruction** – the aim is to restore use (such as knee reconstructive surgery) or improve appearance (such as breast reconstruction following mastectomy). Sometimes, reconstructive surgery achieves both. For example, a cleft palate repair enhances the person's appearance and also improves their ability to eat, swallow and talk.
- **Transplantation** – this is surgery to replace a body part that no longer works properly: for example, a hip replacement or a lung transplant. The part may be artificial (made from silicone, stainless steel or titanium) or natural (donated from a deceased person).
- **Palliative care** – the aim is to reduce pain, control symptoms and improve quality of life when there is no chance of cure. An example of this type of surgery is nerve resection to stop a person from feeling constant pain.

Emergency or elective surgery

Surgeries may be classified by degree of urgency. For example:

- **Emergency surgery** – is surgery to treat trauma or acute illness where a person comes to an emergency department. The patient may require immediate surgery or present for surgery at a later time following this unplanned presentation. This includes where the patient leaves hospital and returns for a subsequent admission. Emergency surgery includes unplanned surgery for admitted patients and unplanned surgery for patients already awaiting an elective surgery procedure (for example, in cases of acute deterioration of an existing condition).
 - **'Elective' surgery** – is planned surgery that can be booked in advance as a result of a specialist clinical assessment that results in the person being placed on an elective surgery waiting list.
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The seriousness of surgery

All surgery carries risk to the person. The factors that determine the degree of risk include the body part that is affected, the seriousness of the medical condition, the extent of surgery, the complexity of surgery and the expected recovery time. Categories include:

- **Major surgery** – such as surgery to the organs of the head, chest and abdomen. Examples of major surgery include organ transplant, removal of a brain tumour, removal of a damaged kidney or open-heart surgery. The person will need to stay in hospital for some time. The risk of complications may be high and the person will take a longer time to recover.
- **Minor surgery** – presents a low risk of complications and fast recovery time. The person can usually go home the same day. Examples of minor surgery include sewing up a cut or biopsy of a breast lump.

The field of surgery

Surgeries can be categorised by field, which includes body systems, diseases or conditions. For example:

- **Orthopaedic surgery** – musculoskeletal system
- **Ocular surgery** – the eyes
- **Neurosurgery** – brain and spinal cord
- **Cardiac surgery** – heart and surrounding blood vessels
- **Surgical oncology** – treats cancer
- **General surgery** – treats [await definition from Clara].

The surgical approach

Surgeries can be categorised by broad technique. For example:

- **Open surgery** – the traditional approach. The surgeon makes a large single incision to access the internal organs. An example is open-heart surgery, where the person's chest is cut down the middle and opened up like a book. Open surgery of the abdominal cavity is known as laparotomy.
- **Keyhole surgery** – the surgeon makes several small cuts (incisions) instead of one large one. Slender surgical instruments are passed through these incisions, including a laparoscope. This is a special viewing tube fitted with a light so the surgeon can see the internal organs. For this reason, keyhole surgery is also known as laparoscopic surgery.
- **Interventional surgery** – [await Clara]

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Your surgeon
- Your nearest 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)

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