

Pre-Surgical Questions To Ask Your Care Team

Be an educated patient and take control of your health. Ask questions before your surgery, be aware of the considerations for your unique body, and understand ahead of time what to anticipate at each stage of your surgery and recovery. Use these questions to guide you in that fact-finding and learning.



General Health & Surgical Readiness

Request that your surgeon review all tests before they occur to understand what they do and how they will be performed, i.e. will scoping be done via the stoma or rectally? Request a review of all test results in detail so that you understand them and what they mean for your surgery and healing. Typical tests are a colonoscopy or endoscopy, CT or MRI, and a Barium Enema test (which tests specifically for leaks). Was anything found that may negatively impact the prognosis?

Surgery Preparation

- What bowel prep will be needed? Every surgeon is different.
- What diet should you observe in the days leading up to surgery?
- Is there anything else that's recommended to ensure that you are in the best possible state for surgery? Most patients will have a presurgical consultation to cover these items. If not, ask questions & be prepared!
- When do you anticipate that I can go back to work? (The type of work that you do will be a large factor).
- What do you think my bowel function will be like after surgery? How long will the post-surgical diarrhea last? Do I need to make accommodations for my bathroom used, based on my anticipated bowel function?

The Surgery

- If you have a colostomy, does the surgeon anticipate converting you to an ileostomy for a period of time to allow your large bowel to heal? If so, for how long?
- How long do they think the surgery will take?
- Based on their knowledge of your history, do they anticipate issues, such as anastomotic leaks (leaks at surgical connection sites), scar tissue, adhesions, or hernias?
- Will they do hernia repair at the time of surgery (if applicable)?
- How do they close the stoma? Will it be stitched together, or left open to close on it's own as healing occurs?

Immediately Post Surgery

- How many days do they anticipate that you'll be in the hospital?
- What is their requirement for when you can go home? (Most patients must have strong bowel sounds and be passing gas or stool before release).
- What activity do they recommend in the hospital for the best recovery?
- What will your diet be in the hospital?

Post Surgery Healing

- What should your diet be like immediately after surgery? In the month to follow? After that?...
- What are your restrictions for lifting and activity? When can you resume exercise, and what limitations exist?
- What will you need to do to care for your stoma closure?
- Based on their experience with patients like yourself, do they have thoughts on what you can anticipate in terms of healing? Discuss urgency (short and long term), the ability to hold back stool based on your anatomy, and general health considerations such as diverticulae or other conditions such as Chron's or IBS.
- What can you reasonably anticipate your recovery to look like? What issues will require you to contact your health care team? Fever, bleeding, infection, etc.