

Surgery for Cancer

Surgery can be used to help prevent, diagnose, or treat cancer. It might also be done to help improve symptoms or take care of problems caused by cancer.



How surgery can be used for cancer

To help prevent cancer: Surgery might help lower your risk of getting certain cancers by removing a growth or a part of your body where cancer is more likely to start.

To diagnose cancer: Surgery might be done to take out a small piece of tissue and test it for cancer. This is called a biopsy. A biopsy is most often the only way to know if a person has cancer.

To find out the stage of a cancer: Surgery might help find out how much cancer there is and if it has spread.

To treat cancer: Surgery can be done to remove part or all of your cancer. It might be the only treatment you need, or you might need other treatments like radiation therapy or chemotherapy.

To help improve symptoms: Surgery might also be used to help treat problems caused by your cancer, like pain or a bowel blockage.



How is cancer surgery done?

The type of surgery you need will depend on your type of cancer, where it is in your body, and how big it is. You might need:

Open surgery: This means you will have an incision (cut) so your surgeon can see the part of your body where your cancer is. This lets your surgeon remove your cancer and protect other organs near your cancer.

Minimally invasive surgery: This means you will have smaller incisions through which your surgeon can insert a camera and small instruments. Your surgeon will remove your cancer through these cuts. Some surgeons use robotic systems to help with these surgeries.



Side effects of surgery

Side effects depend on what type of surgery is done. The most common side effects happen in the area of the body where the surgery was done, such as:

- Pain (this is very common)
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Swelling
- A scar

You might also have blood clots; nausea or vomiting; or damage to your skin, nearby tissues, or other body parts.

Ask your surgeon what side effects you should contact them about and how to reach them in the evening or on weekends.



Getting ready for surgery

Your surgeon and their team will let you know what you will need to do before surgery. They will explain what to expect and give you a chance to ask questions. They will then ask you to sign a consent form giving them permission to do your surgery.

Your surgeon will also give you instructions to help you prepare for your surgery. They will let you know:

- If you need to get some blood tests, x-rays, or other imaging tests
- If you need to stop taking any of your medicines or supplements before surgery
- If you need to stop eating and drinking for some time before surgery
- If you need to do any special prep before your surgery, such as cleaning your skin or emptying your bowels



Questions to ask

Here are some questions you might want to ask your surgeon or their team:

- What kind of surgery do I need?
- What are the risks of this surgery?
- How long will the surgery take? Where will it be done and how long will I need to be there?

- What kind of anesthesia will I need?
- Are there any special things I need to do before surgery?
- What can I expect after surgery?
- What side effects could I have from surgery? How will they be managed and what can I do about them?
- What side effects should I call you about?
- Can I take my usual medicines and supplements before and after surgery?
- When can I eat and drink after surgery? What can I eat or drink?
- How long do I have to wait to get back to my normal activities?
- Will my insurance pay for this surgery? How much will I have to pay?
- When will I need to see you again?



To learn more about surgery for cancer, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/surgery or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.