

# Take an active role in your health and surgical recovery.

This guide provides an overview of safety tips for COVID-19 and outlines 10 easy-to-follow steps to help you feel prepared and reassured for surgery.



## Your health is important.

It's normal to be anxious before surgery. With the added stress of COVID-19, you may have additional concerns about moving forward with a procedure. However, your health and wellness can't wait indefinitely.<sup>1-2</sup>

Health care providers are informed and have implemented processes to safely manage surgery during COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

There are also additional steps you can take as a patient to help protect yourself while you prepare for surgery during this time.



## COVID-19 considerations

Throughout the pandemic, you have heard public health recommendations on how to help keep yourself and others safe.

Those recommendations remain important as health care services resume. Specific guidance may vary by geographic region, but the following are some infection prevention tips recommended by the [CDC](#)<sup>4</sup>:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow
- Clean your hands often using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
- Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces around your home
- Avoid close contact with those who may be ill (even in your own household)
- Maintain physical distance of about 6 feet (2 metres) between yourself and others in public
- Cover your nose and mouth with a cloth face mask/cover when in public (e.g. in the grocery store, running essential errands)
- Contact your health care provider immediately if you feel ill or have symptoms of COVID-19

# Steps to take before your surgery

## 1 Ask questions.



Don't be afraid to ask questions about COVID-19 or about your surgery. It's important that you contact your providers to learn more about the plans for your treatment and recovery, including any pandemic-related considerations put in place to promote your safety and the safety of those taking care of you.<sup>2-3</sup>

Here are some examples of questions you may want to discuss<sup>2-3</sup>:

- What policies or protocols do you have in place for COVID-19?
- What is your testing policy for patients and staff?
- What happens next if I test positive?
- Can I have family/visitors with me?
- What happens if I have a complication?
- How will my post-discharge care and follow-up appointments be managed?

## 2 Share your medical history.



Before surgery, your providers will speak to you about your medical history. Due to new safety measures, some of your pre-op information may be collected over the phone or video conference. This information assists your surgical team in tailoring care to help you have a safe operation and good recovery.<sup>5-9</sup>

You should let your providers know if you:

- Have symptoms of respiratory illness (coughing, shortness of breath, sneezing) or have been in close contact with someone displaying those symptoms<sup>1</sup>
- Have a fever, chills or sweats<sup>1</sup>
- Have diabetes or other chronic condition<sup>5-8</sup>
- Have any known allergies<sup>8</sup>
- Have had a complication with surgery or anesthesia in the past<sup>8</sup>
- Are taking any medications (including vitamins or herbal remedies)<sup>6,8</sup>

## 3 Stop smoking as soon as possible.



People who smoke are more prone to developing infections and other complications related to surgery. The American College of Surgeons recommends that you stop smoking at least four weeks before surgery and refrain from smoking for as long as possible after surgery, to help your overall recovery.<sup>10-11</sup>

Ask your medical team if you need help to stop smoking, if at least only temporarily.

## 4 Be as healthy as you can be.



Doing what you can to exercise regularly, maintain physical health, and strive for a healthy body weight before surgery may help you recover and return to daily activities after.<sup>6,9</sup>

Your providers may provide more specifics around the following, but consider<sup>6,9</sup>:

- Eating a well-balanced diet by selecting foods rich in vitamins, minerals and proteins
- Engaging in regular physical activity to help build strength and energy
- Being mindful of your alcohol consumption. Even moderate amounts can affect your recovery<sup>12</sup>

## 5 Don't remove hair.



It may be tempting to shave, wax, epilate or use hair removal creams around your surgical area prior to surgery, but don't! Removing hair can damage the skin prior to surgery which can weaken the body's defence against germs.<sup>7,13-15</sup>

If hair removal is necessary, it will be removed with special clippers designed for medical use on the day of surgery.<sup>7,14-15</sup>

## What to do at the time of your surgery

### 6 Shower or bathe on the day of your operation.



Have a hot shower or bath using plain soap on the night before your surgery and/or in the morning on the day of your surgery. Your doctor may give you special instructions to use an antiseptic soap instead of plain soap.<sup>7,9,14-15</sup>

### 7 Keep warm.



Patients that are actively kept warm before, during and after surgery have better outcomes than patients who are cold.<sup>7,14-17</sup> Before surgery, your medical team may provide you with a special warming gown that gently blows warm air over the skin to increase your temperature.<sup>16-17</sup>

You can help by doing the following:

- Wear the warming gown given to you as near to the time of surgery as possible, even if you don't feel cold
- Inform the medical staff if you feel cold or uncomfortable at any point

To learn more, consult your health care professional.

## After your surgery

### 8 Ensure hands are kept clean.



Maintaining clean hands can help stop the spread of germs that may cause infections.<sup>7,14-15</sup> Whether you're in a post-op recovery area, at a follow up visit or at home, encourage those around you to help keep you safe by making sure their hands are clean. If you didn't see them clean their hands, don't be afraid to ask them to do so.<sup>5,9</sup>

## 9 Know the signs of possible complications and speak up.



Your team should provide specific instructions on how to care for your incision site and any dressings or devices that may be needed.<sup>18</sup> Before going home, you should have a clear understanding of discharge instructions, follow-up appointments, what to watch out for, and who to call if you need help or have a problem. The following signs and symptoms should be reported immediately<sup>5,7,18</sup>:

- The skin around your wound becomes red, swollen, hot or painful
- Your wound has a green, yellow, cloudy, or foul-smelling discharge (pus)
- You have a temperature above 38°C (100.4°F)
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Bleeding beyond what you've been told to expect
- You feel generally unwell

## 10 Be kind to yourself and others.



Everyday activities may feel overwhelming but taking care of your mental well-being and resilience is important to your long-term healing.<sup>19</sup>

The following are some straightforward tips for self-care and coping with stress<sup>19</sup>:

- Pause and take some deep breaths. Pay attention to how you feel
- Take breaks from pandemic news coverage and try to do something you enjoy
- Try to get enough sleep
- Follow your provider's recommendation for physical activity
- Stay connected to your loved ones and support systems

More information on coping with stress during COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

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# 3M

**3M Canada Company**  
Medical Solutions Division  
300 Tartan Drive  
London, Ontario N5V 4M9  
Canada  
1-800-364-3577  
3M.ca

**3M Company**  
2510 Conway Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55144  
USA  
1-800-228-3957

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