

# Having an operation at the Royal Free London

## Information for patients

This booklet answers common questions about having an operation at one of our hospitals.

It will help you prepare for your hospital stay and make arrangements for going home. You may also be given additional information leaflets specific to your surgery.

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## Check list

1. Double check your letter to see where you will be having your operation. It may be different to where your previous appointments were.
2. Make arrangements to travel to and from the hospital. You must be collected from the hospital, and we recommend you travel home by car or taxi if possible. We discourage you from travelling by public transport as you will still be recovering from the effects of the operation and anaesthetic.
3. Arrange for someone to stay with you for 24 hours after you have been discharged. You must have a responsible adult available to stay with you for 24 hours after your operation while you recover from the anaesthetic and surgery. If you don't have an available responsible adult who can stay with you overnight after discharge, please inform your surgical team or pre-assessment team ahead of the surgical date.
4. Make sure you have a supply of your regular medication, over-the-counter pain relief and laxatives at home, for example paracetamol and senna. These will usually not be provided, so please speak to your GP if you need further supplies.
5. Make arrangements for any dependent relatives or your pets to be cared for while you are in hospital. Our units and ward areas are busy clinical environments. We do not have facilities for dependants to stay with you. Please ensure you make appropriate arrangements for the duration of your hospital stay.
6. Arrange to take time off work, school, or college. In all cases, you will also need to take the day after your operation off, so please plan ahead with your employer, school or college, if necessary. For procedures that have a longer recovery time, you will need to arrange a longer period of absence.
7. If you drive, check your car insurance is not affected by your surgery.

## Pre-operative assessment appointment

Preoperative assessment (pre-assessment) aims to ensure it is safe for you to have your surgical procedure under general anaesthetic, regional anaesthetic, or sedation. We assess your medical history and optimise your health, to ensure you are in the best condition to undergo the surgical procedure. The surgery cannot go ahead until you have had your pre-assessment and have been declared fit for surgery.

We offer different types of pre-assessment appointments, including telephone or face-to-face appointment, dependant on your medical history and type of surgery planned.

You will either see a nurse or a nurse and a consultant anaesthetist. You will additionally have an appointment with our health care assistant (HCA).

During the appointment you will be asked detailed questions about your health and medications you take.

Please ensure you have the following available for your appointment:

- A list of your regular medications
- Hospital letters or records, relevant to your medical history
- Pacemaker card, if applicable

You do not need to fast before your pre-assessment.

During the pre-assessment visit, you may be asked to have routine observations taken, such as: a blood pressure, heart rate and temperature check, and blood, swabs and urine tests, and ECG (electrocardiogram).

## **Preparing for your operation**

Before coming in for your operation, it is important to plan your hospital stay and immediate period post discharge home.

### **What will I need during my hospital stay?**

Please bring:

- Any medicines you are taking in their original packaging including inhalers, eye drops, creams, dosette box medication and any injections, your steroid card and warfarin book (if you have these) – these will be used for your treatment during your stay and returned to you when you leave, if appropriate.
- Pacemaker card
- The name and phone number of your escort and next of kin.
- Comfortable loose-fitting clothes to wear in hospital and to go home in
- A dressing gown.
- Well-fitting slippers or shoes with non-slip soles
- Something to help pass the time, such as a book.
- Glasses, dentures, and walking/hearing aids, if required.
- Toiletries if you are staying in hospital overnight.

Please do not bring:

- any jewellery, valuables, or large amounts of money
- large bags or suitcases.

The Royal Free London will not accept responsibility or liability for any loss or damage to a patient's property, under any circumstances, unless it has been handed in and signed for by a member of hospital staff.

### **Do I need to do anything to prepare for my surgery?**

It is important to follow these personal hygiene instructions before coming into hospital to help protect you from developing an infection after surgery:

1. Have a shower or bath the night before and on the morning of your operation.
2. If you were given antiseptic wipes during your pre-assessment, after drying with a clean towel, use the wipes on your neck, chest, arms, legs, perineum, buttocks (do not use internally) and back, if possible – use half of the packet of wipes the night before and the remaining wipes the morning of your procedure. Let your body air dry – your body will feel sticky for a few minutes as the wipes take effect.
3. If you are having foot surgery, please also use wipes on both feet on the morning of your operation.
4. If you develop any adverse reactions or sensitivity to the wipes, wash your skin off and discontinue use.
5. It is advisable to treat and manage any dental concerns including loose/wobbly teeth and any ongoing dental pain to minimise risk of infections and

intraoperative dental damage. If you wear dentures, you will be asked to remove them prior to entering the operating theatre. A denture pot will be provided for you to store them until you return from the operating theatre.

Please also:

- Remove any nail varnish or false/acrylic nails, make up, body piercings and jewellery – you may still wear your wedding ring.
- You may wear a hearing aid or glasses, but not contact lenses. Bring equipment for your lenses if you wear them.

### **Eating and drinking – fasting instructions**

Patients who are having a general anaesthetic or sedation must not eat and drink for a period beforehand, because of the risk of aspiration under the anaesthetic. However, long periods of fasting are unnecessary and can make you dehydrated, thirsty, and hungry.

#### **We ask that you follow these rules for eating and drinking:**

- You **must not eat any food**, including chewing gum and boiled sweets, **for six hours** before your operation.
- You **may drink clear fluids\*** up to **two hours** before your operation.

\*The following liquids are considered clear fluids:

- water (still or sparkling)
- tea or coffee without milk/cream or sugar

Please note that drinks containing milk or juices with pulp (e.g., smoothies or tea/coffee with milk) must be avoided for six hours before your operation.

If you have not been given a time for your operation, please assume it will be no earlier than 8.00am. We encourage you to have a drink of water up to 6.00 am, to prevent you becoming thirsty. Please also bring a bottle of water with you when you come to the hospital.

#### **Is there anything I shouldn't do before my surgery?**

- Do not drink alcohol the night before your operation.
- Do not smoke for 12 hours before your operation.
- Take caution when using hair removal products including razors. If your skin is damaged or cut, this can increase your risk of developing an infection after your operation and we may need to postpone your surgery.
- Please note that exposure to anaesthetic and surgery can be harmful to an unborn child. A pregnancy test will be requested from women of childbearing age on the day of surgery. Use of appropriate precautions, e.g.: contraception is encouraged, prior to your surgical date.

## Taking my usual medication

Please check with the pre-assessment nurse whether you should continue taking your prescribed medicines. Tablets are not considered food and, if instructed, you should take them before you leave home, with a sip of water.

Please do not take the following medicines on the day of your procedure:

Some medications (such as some blood thinners, diabetic and blood pressure medications) need to be stopped in advance of surgery. Please follow the instructions below if appropriate.

## **On the day of surgery**

### **What will happen on the day?**

We will have asked you to come into hospital at a specific time, but please note this is not the time of your operation and there may be a significant wait before you go to the operating theatre. The admission team will need to perform several checks before your operation, including taking your blood pressure, pulse rate and temperature, and you will meet with your anaesthetist and surgeon.

Your surgeon may talk to you about the operation and ask you to sign a consent form giving your permission for the procedure to go ahead. They may also mark your skin with a pen to highlight the operation site. If you have any questions about the procedure, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your anaesthetist will confirm your medical history and discuss the anaesthetic plan and the pain relief you will have during and after the operation.

We will endeavour to keep you informed of the operating theatre schedule and we appreciate your patience on the day. Please do bring in something to keep you entertained during your wait and ask a nurse to store any valuables before you go for your procedure.

### **Having an anaesthetic**

More information about having an anaesthetic and the different types of anaesthesia is available on our website. Other useful resources are available to view at:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/anaesthetics](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/anaesthetics)

Please also refer to the Royal College of Anaesthetist website, where useful information about anaesthesia can be found. Links and QR codes are provided on page 18 of this booklet.

[www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/patient-information-leaflets-video-resources](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/patient-information-leaflets-video-resources)

### **After the operation**

After the operation you will wake up in the recovery area of the operating theatres. A recovery nurse will check your vital signs regularly and take care of you until you are able to return to your designated ward/unit.

When you first come round from an anaesthetic you may feel woozy and disorientated. Some patients also feel sick or have a dry mouth and sore throat. Please tell us if you experience any of these symptoms, or if you have any pain, as we can offer medicine to help relieve this.



## **Day surgery**

If your operation requires only a short stay in hospital, it can take place as a 'day case'. This means that we aim to discharge you home on the same day as your operation.

### **On arrival to the day surgery unit**

When you arrive in the day surgery unit, please check-in at reception. Tell the receptionist if any of your personal details (eg, your address, contact details, GP or next of kin) have changed and they will be happy to update your file.

A nurse will advise you how long you can expect to wait before going to the operating theatre. You will need to change into a theatre gown and put on the supplied compression stockings shortly before your operation.

We don't have a waiting area or facilities for accompanying friends, relatives, or children. Anyone requiring an escort home will be provided with phone numbers to contact to find out the estimated pick-up time. A member of staff will contact your escort if the estimated pick-up time is likely to change.

### **After the operation**

Once back on the day surgery unit you will be able to have something to eat and drink. Length of recovery time varies, but you can expect to stay a minimum of 2 hours following a general anaesthetic prior to discharging home.

Try to follow these simple steps to help your recovery:

- Take slow deep breaths if you feel able to – this helps prevent chest infection after surgery.
- Do some gentle leg exercises such as rotating and flexing your foot – this helps prevent blood clots after surgery.

### **Going home after day surgery**

Once the nurses on the unit have decided that you are ready to go home, you will be provided with a discharge letter and other information or advice you need. Please ask your escort to collect you from the day surgery unit. You may also need to wait for any discharge medications.

In some circumstances, for example if your procedure takes longer than anticipated or you take longer to recover following the procedure, we may need to keep you in hospital overnight. If this is the case, our staff will contact your escort and let them know the plan.

### **For the first 24 hours at home do not:**

- drive, operate machinery, use a cooker, ride a bicycle, sign legal documents.
- take sleeping tablets.
- drink alcohol.

### **Once at home**

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please contact the hospital where you had surgery or your GP for advice:

- increased pain or swelling at the site of surgery.
- high temperature.
- bleeding in the area where you had surgery.
- difficulty passing urine.

Our contact details are provided on page 12 of this booklet.

In the unlikely event of an emergency visit your nearest emergency department, taking your discharge letter with you.

## **Overnight admissions**

Some operations have a longer recovery time. This means you'll need at least an overnight stay in hospital to recover after your operation. At your pre-assessment, your nurse can give you an idea of your expected length of stay in hospital.

Generally, we will ask you to come into our surgical admissions area on the day of your operation. After your operation, you will be transferred to a ward or back to the admissions area to recover until you are medically fit to leave the hospital.

Please remember, it is not possible for you to stay in hospital once you no longer need hospital care.

## **What do I need to bring with me?**

We encourage our patients, where possible, to be dressed during the day and take an active part in their recovery from surgery. Please make sure you bring in comfortable loose-fitting clothes for the day, well-fitting slippers or shoes with non-slip soles, toiletries and glasses, medications, dentures, and walking/hearing aids if required.

A full list of what to bring with you into hospital is available on page five of this booklet. Please do not bring in any valuables as you will be required to sign a waiver and be liable if these are then lost/misplaced.

After your surgery, a nurse will collect your belongings from the admissions area and bring them to you. We have small bedside lockers where you can store your belongings. Please do not bring in any large bags or suitcases as space on our wards is very limited.

## **On arrival to the surgical admissions area**

When you arrive in the admissions area, please check-in at reception. Tell the receptionist if any of your personal details (e.g., your address, contact details, GP or next of kin) have changed and they will be happy to update your file.

A nurse will introduce themselves when you arrive and will advise you how long you can expect to wait before going to the operating theatre. You will need to change into a theatre gown and put on the supplied compression stockings shortly before your operation.

## **After the operation**

Once on the ward you may be able to have something to eat and drink. A nurse will give you an approximate date for when you will be able to leave the hospital (also known as an expected discharge date).

Try to follow these simple steps to help your recovery:

- Take slow deep breaths if you can – this helps prevent chest infection after surgery.
- Do some gentle leg exercises such as rotating and flexing your foot – this helps prevent blood clots after surgery.

### **Going home after your admission**

Before leaving the hospital, we must ensure that you are ready for discharge. Your medical team will decide when you are medically fit to leave the hospital. You may be transferred to our discharge lounge on the day of leaving the hospital while you wait to be collected.

### **For the first 24 hours after leaving the hospital do not:**

- drive, operate machinery, use a cooker, ride a bicycle, sign any legal documents.
- take sleeping tablets.
- drink alcohol.

### **What will I be given to take away with me?**

#### **Discharge summary letter**

This is a letter outlining details of your hospital treatment and the medicines you need to continue. A copy will also be sent to your GP. Keep it safe and show it to those involved in your care.

#### **Medicines**

If necessary, we will provide a supply of newly prescribed medicines for up to 14 days only. The pharmacist or nurses on the ward will explain any instructions that you need to follow. Further prescriptions and over the counter medications including pain relief and laxatives should be obtained from your GP or local pharmacy. Your own medicines will be returned to you unless they have been stopped.

#### **Equipment**

You may be given equipment to take and use at home, e.g., walking aids. Someone may need to take these home for you separately.

#### **Supplies**

A short-term supply of things you will need at home will be provided, e.g., stoma or catheter bags, dressings, syringes, and needles. Further supplies should be obtained from your GP.

### **Once at home**

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please contact the hospital where you had surgery (our details can be found on page 12) or your GP for advice:

- increased pain or swelling at the site of surgery.
- high temperature.
- bleeding in the area where you had surgery.

- difficulty passing urine.

In the unlikely event of an emergency, visit your nearest emergency department, and take your discharge letter with you.

## **Information about our day surgery and surgical admissions areas**

Whether you are coming in for day surgery or an overnight admission, please make your way to the reception desk in the following areas at the hospital where you will be having your operation.

### **Barnet Hospital**

- The surgical assessment unit can be found on level 2 next door to Willow ward.
- To contact the area, please call: 020 3758 2000 extension 64042.
- At Barnet Hospital we have a restaurant and cafe which are located on level 1 near the main hospital entrance. There are also vending machines located throughout the hospital.

### **Chase Farm Hospital**

- The theatres reception desk is located on the second floor of the hospital.
- To contact the day surgery unit or theatres, please call:
- Female day surgery: 020 8375 1943
- Male day surgery: 020 8375 1205
- At Chase Farm Hospital we have a costa and shop located on the ground floor. There are also vending machines located in several areas around the hospital.

### **Royal Free Hospital**

To contact Royal Free Hospital, please call: 020 7794 0500, and ask switch board to transfer you to the desired department.

- Location and contact details for the day surgery unit and pre-assessment unit can be found on your appointment letter.
- At the Royal Free Hospital, we have a canteen and cafe on the lower ground floor and a food and drink outlet on the ground floor.

### **Edgware Community Hospital day surgery unit**

We carry out day surgery at Edgware Community Hospital. The unit can be found on the lower ground floor of the hospital.

- To contact the unit, please call: 020 3758 2422.
- The hospital has canteen and cafe facilities on the ground and lower ground floors of the hospital.

## **FAQ (frequently asked questions)**

### **When will I next hear from you?**

Once you have had your pre-assessment, our admissions team will write to you giving you the date and location of your operation if you have not already received this. On occasion you may be recalled back to the preassessment department if any repeat or additional testing is required.

### **When will I get a date for my operation?**

If you do not already have a date for surgery, you will need to wait to be contacted by the admissions department to offer a date, this can either be by telephone, or a letter via post. Timeframes for dates of surgery are based on the level of urgency/priority for your operation. Dates for surgery are not provided unless you have been deemed fit.

### **What can I do to prepare myself for the operation while I wait for a date?**

It is known that fitter patients who work to improve their health and activity levels prior to surgery will recover from surgery quicker. You can do this by increasing activity levels, stopping smoking, and decreasing alcohol intake, eating a well-balanced diet, and practicing mindfulness to help alleviate any anxiety. Please see page 18 for a link to the 'Fitter, better, sooner' resource for more information.

### **Am I able to shave before my surgery?**

You are not required to shave the surgical site before your operation, this will be done by healthcare staff on the day of your surgery if required.

It is also advised to avoid personal hair removal and shaving leading up to surgery. However, if deemed necessary then this can be done using a clipper and not a razor, to prevent cuts which can lead to infections.

### **I did not receive any anti-septic wipes before my surgery, what should I do?**

If no anti-septic wipes were supplied following your preassessment, it is advised to shower both the evening before and on the day of your operation using plain or antimicrobial soap to body wash with clean running water.

### **Will I meet an anaesthetist before my operation?**

You might meet consultant anaesthetist during your preassessment visit and additionally you will meet your anaesthetist on the day of surgery, in day surgery unit, before your operation. You will have an opportunity to discuss the anaesthetic plan and ask any questions you might have. Where anaesthesia associates make up part of the anaesthetic team, the anaesthetist may, delegate some roles to them.

### **Am I allowed to bring someone with me?**

You can ask one relative or friend to come with you. Unfortunately, we do not have a waiting area or facilities for relatives/escorts to wait for you whilst you are having surgery, in the admissions area, so they will be required to leave once you have gone to theatre. Our hospitals have a restaurant and a café, where they can wait, should they wish to.

**What if I arrive late for my operation?**

Please make the day surgery unit aware, via direct number or hospital switchboard, if you are going to be late for your admission time. Unfortunately, late arrival will affect the order of the operating list and may result in cancellation of your procedure. See page 12 for contact details.

**I can't keep my operation as I am busy or unwell.**

Call us as soon as possible using the telephone number on your letter if you cannot keep any of your appointments, you become unwell or you develop a cough or cold.

Another patient may be able to benefit from your appointment slot.

**I'm feeling very anxious about my anaesthetic, what can I do?**

It is very common to be anxious before an operation. You will get an opportunity to meet with the anaesthetist and a member of the surgical team on the day of your surgery, prior to your operation, where you can discuss your queries and any concerns.

Please advise nursing staff upon admission if you are feeling overtly anxious prior to your operation, they may be able to answer questions or find ways to alleviate your anxiety.

Helpful resources can be found on the Royal College of Anaesthetist website, please see page 18 for a list of links and QR codes.

**Can I go home alone following my anaesthetic?**

If you are being discharged home on the same day as your operation, following a general anaesthetic, you will need a responsible adult to escort you home and stay with you for the first 24 hours.

If this is a potential issue for you, please inform the nurse who is completing your preassessment, some additional arrangements can be considered.

## **General information**

### **Food and drink**

Further details about food and drink options at our hospitals is available on our website:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/food-and-drink-at-our-hospitals/](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/food-and-drink-at-our-hospitals/)

### **Hospital support services**

We have a range of support services available at our hospitals:

#### **Chaplaincy service**

A multi-faith team of chaplains is available to support you during your stay. You do not have to think of yourself as religious to seek support.

#### **Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)**

PALS offer support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors about medical services and hospital care. If you are staying with us or visiting someone who is, the best person to talk to in the first instance is a member of ward staff or the ward matron.

If you would like to contact PALS, visit: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/pals](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/pals) or call the team at:

- Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 4924.
- Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8375 1328.
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7472 6446 or 020 7472 6447.

#### **Royal Free Charity volunteers**

Our hospital volunteers can provide support to patients and visitors on the wards. Find out more here: [www.royalfreecharity.org/do/patient-support](http://www.royalfreecharity.org/do/patient-support)

#### **Travelling to and parking at our hospitals**

Information about travelling to our hospitals and parking at each is also available on our website: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/getting-to-our-hospitals](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/getting-to-our-hospitals)

#### **WiFi at our hospitals**

Free WiFi is available on most of our wards. Select 'NHS Wifi' from the list of available WiFi networks on your device – you may need to sign up before you can access the service.

#### **Your experience**

We want to hear from you about your experience. Your feedback will help us to improve our service and the care we deliver. We encourage all patients to fill in a feedback form which can be obtained from hospital staff.

## Other useful resources



### Having an operation – easy read

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/EasyRead2022web.pdf>



### Your anaesthetic

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-05/02-YourAnaesthetic2023web.pdf>



### Spinal anaesthetic

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-05/02-YourAnaesthetic2023web.pdf>



### Sedation

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-05/02-YourAnaesthetic2023web.pdf>



### Fitter better sooner

[https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-02/FitterBetterSooner2022web\\_0.pdf](https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-02/FitterBetterSooner2022web_0.pdf)



### Patient resources in alternative language

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/translations>



## Online resources

### Blood tests

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/blood-tests](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/blood-tests)

### Having an anaesthetic

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/anaesthetics](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/anaesthetics)

### Day surgery

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/day-surgery](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/day-surgery)

### Staying in our hospitals

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/staying-in-our-hospitals](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/staying-in-our-hospitals)

## Patient information leaflets

### Preventing blood clots in veins

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/preventing-blood-clots-veins](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/preventing-blood-clots-veins)

### Download or read our patient information leaflets

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets)

Alternatively, ask a member of staff if you would like a printed leaflet.

## Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email:

[rf.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communications@nhs.net)

## Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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Service: Preoperative assessment unit

Version number: 5

Leaflet reference: RFL732

Approval date: March 2024

Review date: March 2027

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk)