

# Having an operation

Information for patients coming to the Royal Free London for surgery

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

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

You can also watch our short video explaining what to expect on the day of your operation here:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/on-the-day-of-your-operation](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/on-the-day-of-your-operation)

Bring this booklet with you when you come in for your pre-operative assessment appointment and operation.

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# Pre-operative assessment appointment

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Most patients coming in for a planned operation must have a pre-operative assessment appointment before the operation can go ahead. This is commonly known as a pre-assessment. Our pre-assessment clinics are nurse-led with support from the anaesthetic department.

We offer different types of pre-assessment appointments, including telephone, nurse-led and joint nurse and anaesthetist appointments. During your appointment, a nurse will assess your suitability for surgery and ask you questions about your general health and medical history.

They will carry out any tests you need such as blood, swab and urine tests or an ECG (electrocardiogram). They will also give you information about your operation and hospital stay, including how long you can expect to be in hospital for.

We need to make sure that it is safe for you to have a general anaesthetic or sedation, so if required, we won't be able to go ahead with your operation until you have had your pre-assessment.

You do not need to fast before your pre-assessment. If you are visiting the hospital for your appointment, please bring all your regular medicines in their original containers and any recent hospital letters or records with you.

## **What if I arrive late for my appointment?**

We may need to reschedule your appointment if you arrive more than 15 minutes late.

## **I can't keep my appointment 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.

### **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.

Please check your appointment letter to see which of our hospitals you are due to have your operation at, as this may be different to where you have your out-patient or pre-assessment appointment.

Please confirm that you can attend the hospital for your operation on that date by calling the admissions team directly, using the number on your letter.

Your letter will usually ask you to attend the hospital at 7.30am on the day of your operation. There is a chance that between one to four days before your surgery, a pre-assessment nurse or a member of the admissions team will call you and give you a different time to attend – this will be because we have seen the operating list and know that you are not scheduled to have surgery until later in the day. By asking you to arrive later, we want to prevent you from experiencing a long wait on the unit.

# Preparing for your operation

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Before coming in for your operation, plan ahead and think about how you will manage while you are in hospital and when you first leave.

## What will I need during my hospital stay?

Please bring:

- any medicines you are taking including inhalers, in their original containers, 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
- 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.

**Double check your letter to see where you will be having your operation**

**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.

**Arrange for someone to stay with you for 24 hours after you have been discharged**

You must have someone available to stay with you for 24 hours after your operation while you recover from the anaesthetic and surgery. We may have to cancel your operation if you don't.

**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 not be provided unless necessary, so please speak to your GP if you need further supplies.

**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.

**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 make arrangements with your work, school or college if necessary.

For procedures that have a longer recovery time, you will need to arrange a longer period of absence.

**If you drive, check your car insurance is not affected by your surgery**

## 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 reachable – use 4 wipes the night before and 4 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 use the additional wipes on both feet on the morning of your operation.

Please also:

- Remove any nail varnish, 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.

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

**Do not:**

- drink alcohol the night before your operation
- smoke for 12 hours before your operation
- use hair removal products (including razors) which can damage or cut your skin for two weeks before your surgery. If your skin is damaged or cut from hair removal, this can increase your risk of developing an infection after your operation and we may need to postpone your surgery.
- women who are sexually active should use a reliable form of contraception or abstain from having sex from the time between your last period and the operation date. Exposure to anaesthetic can be harmful to an unborn child. A pregnancy test may be carried out for women of childbearing age where appropriate.

## Eating and drinking – fasting instructions

Patients who are having a general anaesthetic or sedation should not eat and drink for a period beforehand because of the risk of vomiting 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 should not eat any food, including chewing gum and boiled sweets, for six hours before your operation. Time for last food:**

**You may drink clear fluids\* up until two hours before your operation. Time for last drink of clear fluids:**

\*The following liquids are okay to have:

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

Drinks containing milk (eg smoothies or tea/coffee with milk) should **not** be taken 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 8.30am. We encourage you to have a drink of water before you leave home to prevent you from becoming thirsty, and to bring a bottle of water with you when you come to the hospital.

## Taking my usual medication

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

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

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

You can find our contact details on your pre-assessment appointment letter and on our website: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk)

## Record of tests ordered at your pre-assessment

Your nurse will tick all that apply to you.

<b>Blood tests</b>	Full blood count	U&E	Group and save*
	Clotting	Glucose	Other
<b>Swabs</b>	MRSA – nose	MRSA – perineum	Other
<b>Tests</b>	ECG	MSU	Other
<b>Other tests required</b>			

\*If you need to have a group and save blood test, this needs to be carried out in the blood test unit in the hospital where you'll be having surgery. Your pre-assessment nurse will let you know if this is the case.

## Day surgery

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If your operation requires only a short stay in hospital it can take place as a 'day case'. What this means is most patients are discharged home on the same day of their operation.

### Is there anything that I need to be aware of?

Please make sure you have made the following arrangements:

- You have someone available to escort you home from hospital and to stay with you for the first 24 hours after your operation – we will have to cancel your operation if you don't.
- You've made any necessary care arrangements for dependents, as our hospitals are very busy clinical environments and we do not have facilities for dependents to stay while you have surgery.
- You have taken the necessary amount of time after your operation off from work, school or college.
- A list of things you need to bring with you to hospital is available on page 6 of this booklet.

### 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.

We don't have a waiting area or facilities for accompanying friends, relatives or children. Anyone providing an escort home is welcome

to take the contact telephone number of the unit and nursing staff will provide an estimated pick-up time. If for any reason this changes, a member of staff will contact your escort.

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

Nurses in our day surgery units are specially trained to care for patients having day case procedures. A nurse will introduce themselves to you 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 hospital gown and put on the supplied compression stockings shortly before your operation.

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 theatre. The theatre team will need to perform a number of checks before your operation, including taking your blood pressure, pulse rate and temperature, and your surgeon will spend some time with you.

They 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 may also visit you to discuss the medicines they intend to use to put you to sleep and what pain relief you will have after the operation.

We will endeavour to keep you informed of the schedule and we appreciate your patience. 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:

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

## Keeping warm before and after your operation

It's very important that your body temperature is normal for surgery (ideally between 36-37.5°C). Your temperature will be taken as a part of your admission and during your stay.

If you are found to be hypothermic (too cold), we may need to postpone your operation because of the potential risks associated with this. We will keep you informed if this is the case.

While waiting for your operation, please keep yourself warm, for example by wearing either your coat, cardigan or dressing gown, and keep your feet covered. If you are found to be too cold, we will provide you with a foil cap and blankets to help warm you up. Please also let us know if you start feeling cold before or after your operation.

## 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, including your blood pressure, and take care of you until you are able to return to the day surgery 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 are able to give you medicine to help relieve this.

Once back on the day surgery unit you will be able to have something to eat and drink.

Try to follow these simple steps to help you re-adjust after your operation and keep you safe:

- Take slow deep breathes if you are able to – this helps prevent chest infections 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

The nurses on the unit will decide when you are ready to go home and will provide you with a discharge letter and other information or advice you need. Please ask your escort to collect you from the day surgery unit.

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 what's happening.

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

- drive, operate machinery, use a cooker, ride a bicycle, sign a legal document or engage in any activity requiring skill or judgement
- 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
- a temperature
- bleeding in the area where you had surgery
- difficulty passing urine.

Our contact details are provided on pages 20-21 of this booklet.

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

# Overnight admissions

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Some operations have a longer recovery time – what this means is you'll need at least an overnight stay in hospital to recover after your operation. At your pre-assessment, your nurse will 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, dentures and walking/hearing aids if required.

A full list of what to bring with you into hospital is available on page 6 of this booklet. Please do not bring in any valuables.

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.

## 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 them to wait with you on the admissions area, so they will be required to leave once you are settled. Our hospitals have a restaurant or cafe where they are able to wait should they wish to. Please see pages

20-21 for more information.

### **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 (eg your address, contact details, GP or next of kin) have changed and they will be happy to update your file.

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

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.

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 theatre. The theatre team will need to perform a number of checks before your operation, including taking your blood pressure, pulse rate and temperature, and your surgeon will spend some time with you.

They 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 may also visit you to discuss the medicines they intend to use to put you to sleep and what pain relief you will have after the operation.

We will endeavour to keep you informed of the schedule and we appreciate your patience. 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:

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

## Keeping warm before and after your operation

It's very important that your body temperature is normal for surgery (ideally between 36-37.5°C). Your temperature will be taken as a part of your admission and during your stay.

If you are found to be hypothermic (too cold), we may need to postpone your operation because of the potential risks associated with this. We will keep you informed if this is the case.

While waiting for your operation, please keep yourself warm, for example by wearing either your coat, cardigan or dressing gown, and keep your feet covered. If you are found to be too cold, we will provide you with a foil cap and blankets to help warm you up. Please also let us know if you start feeling cold before or after your operation.

## 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, including your blood pressure, and take care of you until you are able to be moved to the admissions area or a ward. Unfortunately we will not know which area you will be moved to until after your operation.

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 are able to give you medicine to help relieve this.

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) within 24-48 hours.

Try to follow these simple steps to help you re-adjust after your operation and keep you safe:

- Take slow deep breathes if you are able to – this helps prevent chest infections 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 will be safe. Your healthcare 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.

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

- Discharge summary letter:** This is a letter giving details of your hospital treatment and the medicines you need. 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 should be obtained from your GP. 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, eg 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, eg stoma or catheter bags, dressings, syringes and needles. Further supplies should be obtained from your GP.

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

- drive, operate machinery, use a cooker, ride a bicycle, sign a legal document or engage in any activity requiring skill or judgement
- take sleeping tablets
- drink alcohol.

### **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 pages 20-21) or your GP for advice:

- increased pain or swelling
- a temperature
- bleeding in the area where you had surgery
- difficulty passing urine.

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

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

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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 cafe and shop located on the ground floor. There are also vending machines located in a number of areas around the hospital.
- More information about your visit to Chase Farm Hospital is available here:  
[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/welcometocfh](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/welcometocfh)

## Royal Free Hospital

- Location and contact details for the day surgery unit and surgical 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 within the hospital.

## 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.

# General information

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## 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 8216 4924
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7472 6446/6447

**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.

When you return home you will receive a telephone call from us asking if you would recommend the hospital to your own friends or family. If you would prefer not to be called, please let a member of nursing staff know. Alternatively you can leave us feedback on Twitter (@RoyalFreeNHS), Facebook or NHS Choices.

## Other useful resources:

### Online

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

### Leaflets

- Preparing to leave hospital
- Patients and staff – partners in reducing infection
- Preventing blood clots in veins

Download our leaflets online here:

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

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

Please stick patient ID sticker here

You have been scheduled to have the following operation/procedure:	
Date of your pre-operative assessment appointment:	
Date of your operation/procedure:	
Your expected length of stay in hospital:	

For a list of references for this booklet or to give us feedback on it, please contact: [rf.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communications@nhs.net)

**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 ask a member of staff.**

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