



# About Your Gastrectomy Surgery

This guide will help you get ready for your gastrectomy surgery at MSK. It will also help you know what to expect as you recover.

Use this guide as a source of information in the days leading up to your surgery. Bring it with you on the day of your surgery. You and your care team will use it as you learn more about your recovery.

## Your care team

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Your caregiver

Your caregiver will learn about your surgery with you. They'll also help you care for yourself while you're healing after surgery. Write their name below.

Caregiver: \_\_\_\_\_



Visit [www.msk.org/pe/gastrectomy](http://www.msk.org/pe/gastrectomy) to view this guide online.

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# About your gastrectomy surgery

## Your stomach

Your stomach is an organ in your digestive system that helps store and digest food. It's located between your esophagus (food pipe) and small intestine (see Figure 1).

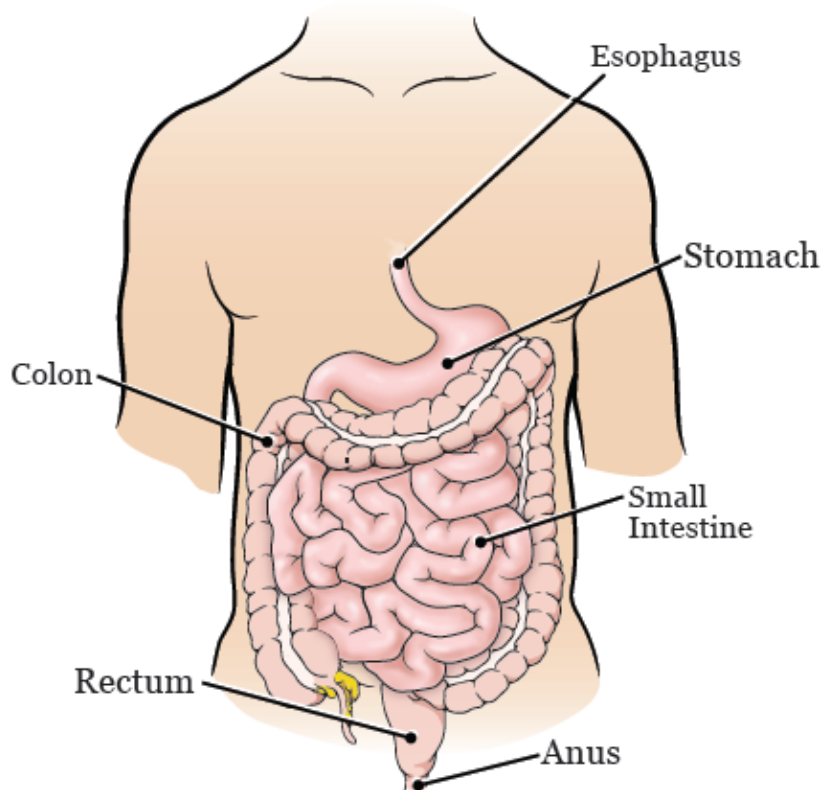


Figure 1. The digestive system

The walls of your stomach are made up of muscles that churn and break down food into small pieces. Your stomach also makes acid that starts to digest (break down) food.

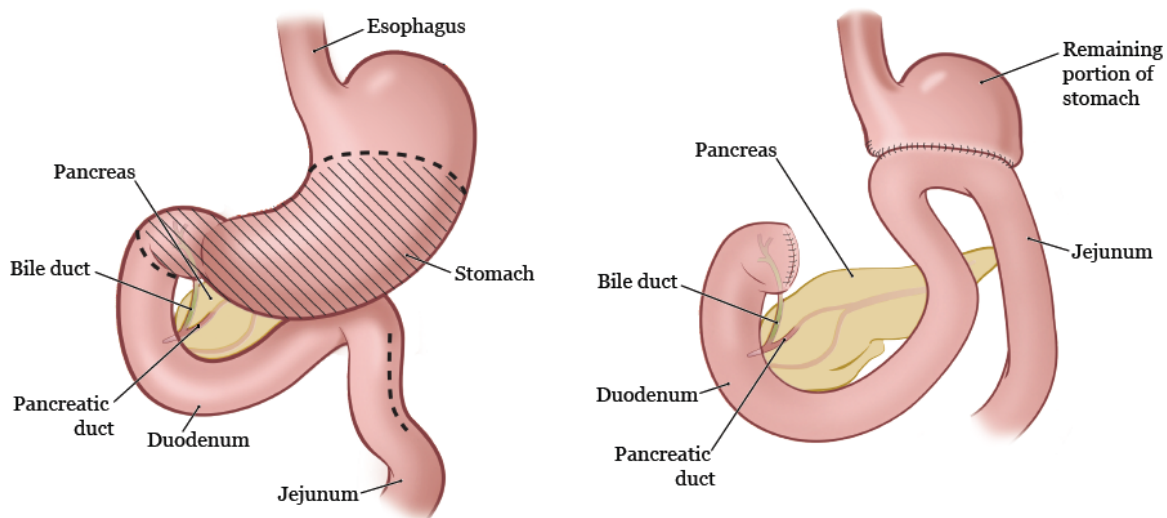
When food leaves your stomach, it moves into your small intestine. The first parts of your small intestine are the duodenum and the jejunum. Your food continues to be digested and absorbed in your small intestine.

# Gastrectomy

Gastrectomy is a surgery that's done to treat stomach cancer. During your gastrectomy, your surgeon may remove part or all of your stomach. There are several kinds of gastrectomies.

## Subtotal gastrectomy

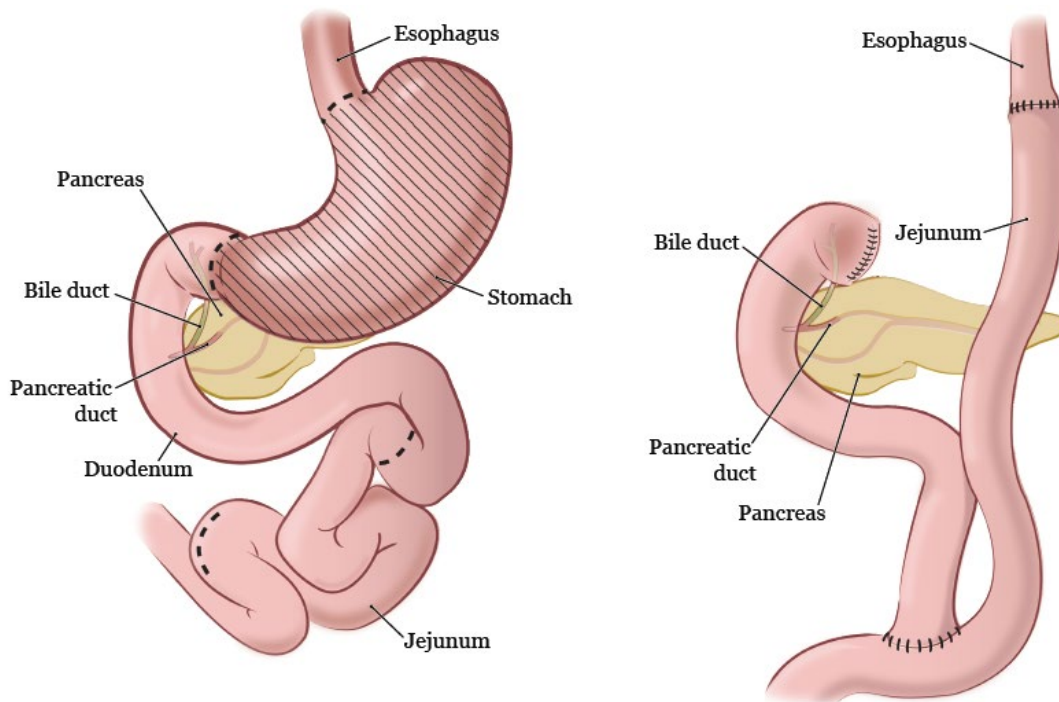
A subtotal gastrectomy includes removing the part of your stomach with cancer, nearby lymph nodes, and possibly parts of other organs near the tumor (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figures 2 and 3. Your digestive system before (left) and after (right) your subtotal gastrectomy (left)

## Total gastrectomy

A total gastrectomy involves removing your whole stomach, nearby lymph nodes, and parts of your esophagus and small intestine. Your esophagus is reconnected to your small intestine so you can continue to eat and swallow (see Figures 4 and 5).



Figures 4 and 5. Your digestive system before (left) and after (right) your total gastrectomy

A gastrectomy can be done in different ways. Your surgeon will talk with you about which options are right for you. Depending on what surgery you have, your surgeon will make 1 or more incisions (surgical cuts) on your belly.

- When 1 long incision is made, it's called an open surgery. Some or all of your stomach is removed through this incision.
- When several small incisions are made, it's called laparoscopic minimally invasive surgery. Small surgical instruments and a laparoscope (a tube-like instrument with a camera) are put into the incisions to remove the part of your stomach that has the cancer.

Your surgeon may use a robotic device to help with your surgery.





# Getting ready for surgery

You and your care team will work together to get ready for your surgery. Help us keep you safe by telling us if any of these things apply to you, even if you're not sure.

- I take any prescription medicines. A prescription medicine is one you can only get with a prescription from a healthcare provider. Examples include:
  - Medicines you swallow.
  - Medicines you take as an injection (shot).
  - Medicines you inhale (breathe in).
  - Medicines you put on your skin as a patch or cream.
- I take any over-the-counter medicines, including patches and creams. An over-the-counter medicine is one you can buy without a prescription.
- I take any dietary supplements, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, or natural or home remedies.
- I have a pacemaker, automatic implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (AICD), or other heart device.
- I have had a problem with anesthesia (A-nes-THEE-zhuh) in the past. Anesthesia is medicine to make you sleep during a surgery or procedure.
- I'm allergic to certain medicines or materials, including latex.
- I'm not willing to receive a blood transfusion.
- I use recreational drugs, such as marijuana.

**Always be sure your healthcare providers know all the medicines and supplements you're taking.**

You may need to follow special instructions before surgery based on the medicines and supplements you take. If you do not follow those instructions, your surgery may be delayed or canceled.

## GLP-1 medicines for weight loss

It's important to tell your healthcare provider if you take a GLP-1 medicine. You will need to follow special eating and drinking instructions before your surgery or procedure. **It is very important to follow these instructions. If you do not follow them, your surgery may be delayed or canceled.**

- **Follow a clear liquid diet the day before your surgery.** Do not eat any solid food. Read *Clear Liquid Diet* to learn more. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/clear-liquid-diet](http://www.msk.org/pe/clear-liquid-diet) or ask for a printed copy.
- **Stop drinking 8 hours before your arrival time.** Do not eat or drink anything after this time, including clear liquids. You can have small sips of water with your medicines.

Read *Eating and Drinking Before Your Surgery or Procedure When Taking GLP-1 Medicines* to learn more. You can ask for a printed copy or find it at [www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1](http://www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1).

Here are some examples of GLP-1 medicines. There are others, so be sure your care team knows all the medicines you take. Sometimes, these are prescribed to help manage diabetes or other conditions. Other times, they are prescribed for weight loss.

- Semaglutide (Wegovy®, Ozempic®, Rybelsus®)
- Dulaglutide (Trulicity®)
- Tirzepatide (Zepbound®, Mounjaro®)
- Liraglutide (Saxenda®, Victoza®)

## About drinking alcohol

It's important to talk with your healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink. This will help us plan your care.

If you drink alcohol regularly, you may be at risk for problems during and after your surgery. These include bleeding, infections, heart problems, and a longer hospital stay.

If you drink alcohol regularly and stop suddenly, it can cause seizures, delirium, and death. If we know you're at risk for these problems, we can prescribe medicine to help prevent them.

Here are things you can do before your surgery to keep from having problems.

- Be honest with your healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink.
- Try to stop drinking alcohol once your surgery is planned. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you:
  - Get a headache.
  - Feel nauseous (like you're going to throw up).
  - Feel more anxious (nervous or worried) than usual.
  - Cannot sleep.

These are early signs of alcohol withdrawal and can be treated.

- Tell your healthcare provider if you cannot stop drinking.
- Ask your healthcare provider questions about drinking and surgery. All your medical information will be kept private, as always.

## **About smoking**

If you smoke, you can have breathing problems when you have surgery. Stopping for even a few days before surgery can help.

Your healthcare provider will refer you to our Tobacco Treatment Program if you smoke. You can also reach the program by calling 212-610-0507 or visit [www.msk.org/tobacco](http://www.msk.org/tobacco) to learn more.

## **About sleep apnea**

Sleep apnea is a common breathing problem. If you have sleep apnea, you stop breathing for short lengths of time while you're asleep. The most common type is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). With OSA, your airway becomes fully blocked during sleep.

OSA can cause serious problems during and after surgery. Tell us if you have or think you might have sleep apnea. If you use a breathing device, such as a CPAP machine, bring it on the day of your surgery.

## **Using MSK MyChart**

MSK MyChart ([mskmychart.mskcc.org](http://mskmychart.mskcc.org)) is MSK's patient portal. You can use it to send and read messages from your care team, view your test results, see your appointment dates and times, and more. You can also invite your caregiver to make their own account so they can see information about your care.

If you do not have an MSK MyChart account, you can sign up at [mskmychart.mskcc.org](http://mskmychart.mskcc.org). You can also ask a member of your care team to send you an invitation.

If you need help with your account, call the MSK MyChart Help Desk at 646-227-2593. They are available Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Eastern time).

# Within 30 days of your surgery

## Presurgical testing (PST)

You'll have a PST appointment before your surgery. You'll get a reminder from your surgeon's office with the appointment date, time, and location.

You can eat and take your usual medicine(s) the day of your PST appointment.

It's helpful to bring these things to your appointment:

- A list of all the medicines you're taking, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, patches, and creams.
- Results of any medical tests done outside of MSK in the past year, if you have them. Examples include results from a cardiac stress test, echocardiogram, or carotid doppler study.
- The names and telephone numbers of your healthcare providers.

You'll meet with an advance practice provider (APP) during your PST appointment. They work closely with MSK's anesthesiology (A-nes-THEE-zee-AH-loh-jee) staff. These are healthcare providers with special training in using anesthesia during a surgery or procedure.

Your APP will review your medical and surgical history with you. You may have tests to plan your care, such as:

- An electrocardiogram (EKG) to check your heart rhythm.
- A chest X-ray.
- Blood tests.

Your APP may recommend you see other healthcare providers. They'll also talk with you about which medicine(s) to take the morning of your surgery.

## Identify your caregiver

Your caregiver has an important role in your care. Before your surgery, you and your caregiver will learn about your surgery from your healthcare providers. After your surgery, your caregiver will take you home when you're discharged. They'll also help you care for yourself at home.



### For caregivers

Caring for a person going through cancer treatment comes with many responsibilities. We offer resources and support to help you manage them.

Visit [www.msk.org/caregivers](http://www.msk.org/caregivers) or read *A Guide for Caregivers* to learn more. You can ask for a printed copy or go to [www.msk.org/pe/guide-caregivers](http://www.msk.org/pe/guide-caregivers) to find it online.

## Fill out a Health Care Proxy form

If you have not already filled out a Health Care Proxy form, we recommend you do now. If you already filled one out or have any other advance directives, bring them to your next appointment.

A health care proxy is a legal document. It says who will speak for you if you can't communicate for yourself. This person is called your health care agent.

- To learn about health care proxies and other advance directives, read *Advance Care Planning*. You can ask for a printed copy or find it at [www.msk.org/pe/advance-care-planning](http://www.msk.org/pe/advance-care-planning)
- To learn about being a health care agent, read *How to Be a Health Care Agent*. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/health-care-agent](http://www.msk.org/pe/health-care-agent) or ask for a printed copy.

Talk with a member of your care team if you have questions about filling out a Health Care Proxy form.

## **Do breathing and coughing exercises**

Practice taking deep breaths and coughing before your surgery. We will give you an incentive spirometer to help expand your lungs. To learn more, read *How To Use Your Incentive Spirometer*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

## **Do physical activity**

Doing physical activity will help your body get into its best condition for your surgery. It will also make your recovery faster and easier.

Try to do physical activity every day. Any activity that makes your heart beat faster, such as walking, swimming, or biking, is a good choice. If it’s cold outside, use stairs in your home or go to a mall or shopping center.

## **Follow a healthy diet**

Follow a well-balanced, healthy diet before your surgery. If you need help with your diet, talk with your healthcare provider about meeting with a clinical dietitian nutritionist.

## **Buy a 4% chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens®**

4% CHG solution is a skin cleanser that kills germs for 24 hours after you use it. Showering with it before your surgery will help lower your risk of infection after surgery. You can buy a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser at your local pharmacy without a prescription.

## **Buy clear liquids**

You’ll need to follow a clear liquid diet before your surgery. It’s helpful to buy clear liquids ahead of time. Read the section “Follow a clear liquid diet” for a list of clear liquids you can drink.

## 7 days before your surgery

### Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking aspirin

Aspirin can cause bleeding. If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to change your dose or stop taking it 7 days before your surgery. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless they tell you to.**

To learn more, read *How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

### Stop taking vitamin E, multivitamins, herbal remedies, and other dietary supplements

Vitamin E, multivitamins, herbal remedies, and other dietary supplements can cause bleeding. Stop taking them 7 days before your surgery. If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.

To learn more, read *Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

## 2 days before your surgery

### Stop taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Advil® and Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®), can cause bleeding. Stop taking them 2 days before your surgery. If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.

To learn more, read *How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

## 1 day before your surgery

### Follow a clear liquid diet

Follow a clear liquid diet the day before your surgery. A clear liquid diet includes only liquids you can see through. You can find examples in the “Clear liquid diet” table.



While you’re following a clear liquid diet:

- Do not eat any solid foods.
- Try to drink at least 1 (8-ounce) cup of clear liquid every hour you’re awake.
- Drink different types of clear liquids. Do not just drink water, coffee, and tea.
- Do not drink any liquids you can’t see through, such as milk or smoothies.
- Do not drink sugar-free liquids unless you have diabetes and a member of your care team tells you to.

### How to follow a clear liquid diet if you have diabetes

Ask the healthcare provider who manages your diabetes:

- What to do while you’re following a clear liquid diet.
- If you need to change your dose of insulin or other diabetes medicine(s), if you take them.
- If you should drink sugar-free clear liquids.

Check your blood sugar level often while you’re following a clear liquid diet. If you have questions, talk with your healthcare provider.

## Clear liquid diet

	OK to have	Do not have
<b>Soups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear broth, bouillon, and consommé.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anything with pieces of food or seasoning.</li> </ul>
<b>Sweets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gelatin, such as Jell-O®.</li> <li>• Flavored ices.</li> <li>• Hard candies, such as Life Savers®, lemon drops, and peppermints.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All others.</li> </ul>
<b>Drinks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear fruit juices, such as lemonade, apple, cranberry, and grape juices.</li> <li>• Soda, such as ginger ale, 7UP®, Sprite®, and seltzer.</li> <li>• Sports drinks, such as Gatorade® and Powerade®.</li> <li>• Coffee without milk or creamer.</li> <li>• Tea without milk or creamer.</li> <li>• Water, including carbonated (fizzy) and flavored water.</li> <li>• Clear nutritional drinks, such as Boost® Breeze, Ensure Clear™, Pedialyte®, and Diabetishield®.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juices with pulp.</li> <li>• Nectars.</li> <li>• Smoothies or shakes.</li> <li>• Milk, cream, and other dairy products.</li> <li>• Nut milks, plant milks, non-dairy creamers, and other dairy alternatives.</li> <li>• Drinks with alcohol.</li> </ul>

## Note the time of your surgery

A staff member will call you after 2 p.m. the day before your surgery. If your surgery is scheduled for a Monday, they'll call you the Friday before. If you do not get a call by 7 p.m., call 212-639-5014.

The staff member will tell you what time to get to the hospital for your surgery. They'll also remind you where to go.

This will be one of these locations:

**Presurgical Center (PSC) at Memorial Hospital on the 2nd floor**

1275 York Ave. (between East 67th and East 68th streets)

New York, NY 10065

Take the M elevator to the 2nd floor.

**Presurgical Center (PSC) at Memorial Hospital on the 6th floor**

1275 York Ave. (between East 67th and East 68th streets)

New York, NY 10065

Take the B elevator to the 6th floor.

Visit [www.msk.org/parking](http://www.msk.org/parking) for parking information and directions to all MSK locations.

## **Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens**

Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser before you go to bed the night before your surgery.

1. Wash your hair with your usual shampoo and conditioner. Rinse your head well.
2. Wash your face and genital (groin) area with your usual soap. Rinse your body well with warm water.
3. Open the 4% CHG solution bottle. Pour some into your hand or a clean washcloth.
4. Move away from the shower stream. Rub the 4% CHG solution gently over your body from your neck to your feet. Do not put it on your face or genital area.
5. Move back into the shower stream to rinse off the 4% CHG solution. Use warm water.
6. Dry yourself off with a clean towel.

Do not put on any lotion, cream, deodorant, makeup, powder, perfume, or cologne after your shower.

# The day of your surgery

## Instructions for drinking

**Important:** If you take a GLP-1 medicine, do not follow these instructions. Follow the instructions in *Eating and Drinking Before Your Surgery or Procedure When Taking GLP-1 Medicines* ([www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1](http://www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1)) instead.

**Between midnight (12 a.m.) and 2 hours before your arrival time, only drink the liquids on the list below. Do not eat or drink anything else. Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time.**

- Water.
- Clear apple juice, clear grape juice, or clear cranberry juice.
- Gatorade or Powerade.
- Black coffee or plain tea. It's OK to add sugar. Do not add anything else.
  - Do not add any amount of any type of milk or creamer. This includes plant-based milks and creamers.
  - Do not add flavored syrup.

If you have diabetes, pay attention to the amount of sugar in these drinks. It will be easier to control your blood sugar levels if you include sugar-free, low-sugar, or no added sugar versions of these drinks.

It's helpful to stay hydrated before surgery, so drink if you are thirsty. Do not drink more than you need. You will get intravenous (IV) fluids during your surgery.



**Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time.** This includes water.

Your healthcare provider may have given you different instructions for when to stop drinking. If so, follow their instructions.

## **Take your medicines as instructed**

A member of your care team will tell you which medicines to take the morning of your surgery. Take only those medicines with a sip of water. Depending on what you usually take, this may be all, some, or none of your usual morning medicines.

## **Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens**

Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser before you leave for the hospital. Use it the same way you did the night before.

Do not put on any lotion, cream, deodorant, makeup, powder, perfume, or cologne after your shower.

## **Things to remember**

- If you wear contact lenses, wear your glasses instead. Wearing contact lenses during surgery can damage your eyes.
- Do not wear any metal objects. Take off all jewelry, including body piercings. The tools used during your surgery can cause burns if they touch metal.
- Leave valuable items at home.
- If you're menstruating (have your monthly period), use a sanitary pad, not a tampon. We'll give you disposable underwear and a pad if you need them.

## **What to bring**

- Sneakers that lace up. You may have some swelling in your feet. Lace-up sneakers can fit over this swelling.
- Your breathing device for sleep apnea (such as your CPAP machine), if you have one.
- Your incentive spirometer, if you have one.

- Your Health Care Proxy form and other advance directives, if you filled them out.
- Your cell phone and charger.
- Only the money you may want for small purchases, such as a newspaper.
- A case for your personal items, if you have any. Eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, prosthetic devices, wigs, and religious articles are examples of personal items.
- This guide. You'll use it to learn how to care for yourself after surgery.

## Once you're in the hospital

When you get to the hospital, if your surgery is on the 2nd floor, take the M elevator. If your surgery is on the 6th floor, take the B elevator. Check in at the desk in the PSC waiting room.

Many staff members will ask you to say and spell your name and birth date. This is for your safety. People with the same or a similar name may be having surgery on the same day.

We'll give you a hospital gown, robe, and nonskid socks to wear when it's time to change for surgery.



### For caregivers, family, and friends

Read *Information for Family and Friends for the Day of Surgery* to help you know what to expect on the day of your loved one's surgery. You can ask for a printed copy or find it at [www.msk.org/pe/info-family-friends](http://www.msk.org/pe/info-family-friends)

## **Meet with a nurse**

You'll meet with a nurse before surgery. Tell them the dose of any medicines you took after midnight (12 a.m.) and the time you took them. Make sure to include prescription and over-the-counter medicines, patches, and creams.

Your nurse may place an intravenous (IV) line in one of your veins, usually in your arm or hand. If your nurse does not place the IV, your anesthesiologist (A-nes-THEE-zee-AH-loh-jist) will do it in the operating room.

## **Meet with an anesthesiologist**

You'll also meet with an anesthesiologist before surgery. They will:

- Review your medical history with you.
- Ask if you've had any problems with anesthesia in the past, such as nausea or pain.
- Talk with you about your comfort and safety during your surgery.
- Talk with you about the kind of anesthesia you'll get.
- Answer your questions about your anesthesia.

## **Get ready for surgery**

When it's time for your surgery, you'll take off your eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, prosthetic devices, wig, and religious articles.

You'll either walk into the operating room or a staff member will bring you there on a stretcher. A member of the operating room team will help you onto the operating bed. They'll put compression boots on your lower legs. These gently inflate and deflate to help blood flow in your legs.

Once you're comfortable, your anesthesiologist will give you anesthesia through your IV line and you'll fall asleep. You'll also get fluids through your IV line during and after your surgery.



# What to expect

When you wake up after your surgery, you'll be in the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU).

A nurse will be keeping track of your body temperature, pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen levels. You may be getting oxygen through a thin tube that rests below your nose or a mask that covers your nose and mouth.

You'll stay in the PACU until you're awake and your pain is under control. Most people go to their room after a few hours in the PACU, but some will need to stay in the PACU overnight for observation.

After your stay in the PACU, a staff member will take you to your hospital room in the inpatient unit. There, your nurse will tell you how to recover from your surgery. Below are examples of ways you can help yourself recover safely.

- Walk around after surgery. Walking every 2 hours is a good goal. This will help prevent blood clots in your legs. To learn more about how walking can help you recover, read *Frequently Asked Questions About Walking After Your Surgery*. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/walking-after-surgery](http://www.msk.org/pe/walking-after-surgery) or ask for a printed copy.
- Use your incentive spirometer. This will help your lungs expand, which prevents pneumonia. To learn more, read *How To Use Your Incentive Spirometer*. You can find it in the "Educational resources" section of this guide.

# Common questions: During your hospital stay

## Will I have pain after my surgery?

You'll have some pain after your surgery. Your doctor and nurse will ask you about your pain often and give you medication to control your pain. At first, you'll get your pain medication through your epidural catheter or IV line. You'll be able to control your pain medication using a PCA device. Read *Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA)* for more information. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/pca](http://www.msk.org/pe/pca) or ask for a printed copy.

If your pain isn't relieved, tell one of your healthcare providers. They will give you a prescription for pain medicine before you leave the hospital. It's important to control your pain so you can use your incentive spirometer and move around. Controlling your pain will help you recover better.

Some prescription pain medications (such as opioids) may cause constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual).

## How can I prevent constipation?

Talk with your healthcare provider about how to prevent and manage constipation. You can also follow these guidelines.

- Go to the bathroom at the same time every day. Your body will get used to going at that time. But if you feel like you need to go, don't put it off.
- Try to use the bathroom 5 to 15 minutes after meals. After breakfast is a good time to go. That's when the reflexes in your colon are strongest.
- Exercise, if you can. Walking is a great type of exercise that can help prevent and manage constipation.

- Drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) cups (2 liters) of liquids daily, if you can. Choose water, juices (such as prune juice), soups, and milkshakes. Limit liquids with caffeine, such as coffee and soda. Caffeine can pull fluid out of your body.
- Slowly increase the fiber in your diet to 25 to 35 grams per day. Unpeeled fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and cereals contain fiber. If you have an ostomy or recently had bowel surgery, ask your healthcare provider before changing your diet.
- Both over-the-counter and prescription medicines can treat constipation. Ask your healthcare provider before taking any medicine for constipation. This is very important if you have an ostomy or have had bowel surgery. Follow the instructions on the label or from your healthcare provider. Examples of over-the-counter medicines for constipation are:
  - Docusate sodium (Colace®). This is a stool softener (medicine that makes your bowel movements softer) that causes few side effects. You can use it to help prevent constipation. Do not take it with mineral oil.
  - Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®). This is a laxative (medicine that causes bowel movements) that causes few side effects. Take it with 8 ounces (1 cup) of a liquid. Only take it if you're already constipated.
  - Senna (Senokot®). This is a stimulant laxative, which can cause cramping. It's best to take it at bedtime. Only take it if you're already constipated.

If any of these medicines cause diarrhea (loose, watery bowel movements), stop taking them. You can start again if you need to.

## **Will I be able to eat?**

You cannot eat for the first day or 2 following the surgery. Then you'll be on a clear liquid diet. After that, your diet will progress to a regular diet as tolerated.

You'll be able to eat smaller amounts of food than before your surgery. You'll be encouraged to eat smaller meals, more frequently throughout the day. To learn more, read *Diet and Nutrition Before and After Your Gastrectomy*. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/diet-gastrectomy](http://www.msk.org/pe/diet-gastrectomy) or ask for a printed copy.

Eating a balanced diet high in protein will help you heal after surgery. Your diet should include a healthy protein source at each meal, as well as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

If you have questions about your diet, ask to see a clinical dietitian nutritionist.

## **How long will I be in the hospital?**

Most people are in the hospital for about 5 days after having a gastrectomy, but this will depend on the exact surgery you had.

## **Common questions: After you leave the hospital**

### **Will I have pain when I am home?**

The length of time each person has pain or discomfort varies. You may still have some pain when you go home and will probably be taking pain medication.

Follow these guidelines to help manage your pain at home.

- Take your medicine(s) as directed and as needed.
- Call your healthcare provider if the medicine prescribed for you does not help your pain.
- Do not drive or drink alcohol while you're taking prescription pain medicine. Some prescription pain medicines can make you drowsy (very sleepy). Alcohol can make the drowsiness worse.

- You'll have less pain and need less pain medicine as your incision heals. An over-the-counter pain reliever will help with aches and discomfort. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) are examples of over-the-counter pain relievers.
  - Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for stopping your prescription pain medicine.
  - Do not take too much of any medicine. Follow the instructions on the label or from your healthcare provider.
  - Read the labels on all the medicines you're taking. This is very important if you're taking acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is an ingredient in many over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Taking too much can harm your liver. Do not take more than one medicine that has acetaminophen without talking with a member of your care team.
- Pain medicine should help you get back to your normal activities. Take enough to do your activities and exercises comfortably. You may have a little more pain as you start to be more active.
- Keep track of when you take your pain medicine. It works best 30 to 45 minutes after you take it. Taking it when you first have pain is better than waiting for the pain to get worse.

## Can I shower?

Yes. Taking a warm shower is relaxing and can help decrease muscle aches. Use soap when you shower and gently wash your incision. Pat the areas dry with a towel after showering, and leave your incision uncovered (unless there is drainage). Call your doctor if you see any redness or drainage from your incision.

Do not take tub baths until you discuss it with your doctor at the first appointment after your surgery.

## **How do I care for my incision?**

The location of your incision will depend on the type of surgery you had. It's normal to have numbness of the skin below the incision because some of the nerves were cut; this sensation will lessen over time.

- By the time you are ready to leave the hospital, your surgical incision will have begun to heal.
- Look at your incision with your nurse before you leave the hospital so you know what it looks like.
- If any liquid is draining from your incision, you should write down the amount and color. Call your doctor's office and speak with the nurse about any drainage from your incision.

Change your bandages at least once a day and more often if they become wet with drainage. When there is no longer any drainage coming from your incision, they can be left uncovered.

If you go home with Steri-Strips™ on your incision, they'll loosen and fall off by themselves. If they haven't fallen off within 10 days, you may remove them.

If you go home with glue over your sutures (stitches), it will also loosen and peel off, similarly to the Steri-Strips.

If your surgeon uses staples to close your incision, you'll have them removed at your postoperative visit at the outpatient clinic.

## **When is it safe for me to drive?**

You may resume driving 3 weeks after surgery as long as you are not taking pain medication that may make you drowsy.

## **What exercises can I do?**

Exercise will help you gain strength and feel better. Walking and stair climbing are excellent forms of exercise. Gradually increase the distance you walk. Climb stairs slowly, resting or stopping as needed. Ask your doctor or nurse before starting more strenuous exercises.

## **When can I lift heavy objects?**

Check with your doctor before you do any heavy lifting. Normally, you should not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds for at least 6 weeks. Ask your doctor how long you should avoid heavy lifting.

## **When is my first appointment after my surgery?**

Your first appointment after surgery will be in 1 to 3 weeks after you leave the hospital. Your nurse will give you instructions on how to make this appointment, including the phone number to call.

## **How can I cope with my feelings?**

After surgery for a serious illness, you may have new and upsetting feelings. Many people say they felt weepy, sad, worried, nervous, irritable, and angry at one time or another. You may find that you cannot control some of these feelings. If this happens, it's a good idea to seek emotional support.

The first step in coping is to talk about how you feel. Family and friends can help. Your nurse, doctor, and social worker can reassure, support, and guide you. It's always a good idea to let these professionals know how you, your family, and your friends are feeling emotionally. Many resources are available to patients and their families. Whether you are in the hospital or at home, the nurses, doctors, and social workers are here to help you and your family and friends handle the emotional aspects of your illness.

# When to call your healthcare provider



Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- A fever of 101 °F (38.3 °C) or higher
- Shortness of breath
- Warmer than normal skin around your incision
- Increased discomfort in the area
- Increased redness around your incision
- New or increased swelling around your incision

## Contact information

Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., call your healthcare provider's office.

After 5 p.m., during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-2000. Ask to speak to the person on call for your healthcare provider.

Notes \_\_\_\_\_

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# MSK support services

## Admitting Office

212-639-7606

Call if you have questions about your hospital admission, such as asking for a private room.

## Anesthesia

212-639-6840

Call if you have questions about anesthesia.

## Blood Donor Room

212-639-7643

Call for information if you're interested in donating blood or platelets.

## Bobst International Center

[www.msk.org/international](http://www.msk.org/international)

888-675-7722

We welcome patients from around the world and offer many services to help. If you're an international patient, call for help arranging your care.

## Counseling Center

[www.msk.org/counseling](http://www.msk.org/counseling)

646-888-0200

Many people find that counseling helps them. Our Counseling Center offers counseling for individuals, couples, families, and groups. We can also prescribe medicine to help if you feel anxious or depressed. Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call the number above to make an appointment.

## Food Pantry Program

646-888-8055

We give food to people in need during their cancer treatment. Talk with a member of your care team or call the number above to learn more.

## **Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service**

[www.msk.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.msk.org/integrativemedicine)

Our Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care. For example, we offer music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Call 646-449-1010 to make an appointment for these services.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service. They'll work with you to make a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. Call 646-608-8550 to make an appointment for a consultation.

## **MSK Library**

[library.mskcc.org](http://library.mskcc.org)

You can visit our library website or email [asklibrarian@mskcc.org](mailto:asklibrarian@mskcc.org) to talk with the library reference staff. They can help you find more information about a type of cancer. You can also visit [libguides.mskcc.org/patienteducation](http://libguides.mskcc.org/patienteducation) to see the library's Patient Education Resource Guide.

## **Nutrition Services**

[www.msk.org/nutrition](http://www.msk.org/nutrition)

212-639-7312

Our Nutrition Service offers nutritional counseling with one of our clinical dietitian nutritionists. Your clinical dietitian nutritionist will talk with you about your eating habits. They can also give advice on what to eat during and after treatment. Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call the number above to make an appointment.

## **Patient and Community Education**

[www.msk.org/pe](http://www.msk.org/pe)

Visit our patient and community education website to search for educational resources, videos, and online programs.

## **Patient Billing**

646-227-3378

Call if you have questions about preauthorization with your insurance company. This is also called preapproval.

## **Patient Representative Office**

212-639-7202

Call if you have questions about the Health Care Proxy form or concerns about your care.

## **Perioperative Nurse Liaison**

212-639-5935

Call if you have questions about MSK releasing any information while you're having surgery.

## **Private Duty Nurses and Companions**

646-357-9272

You can request private nurses or companions to care for you in the hospital and at home. Call to learn more.

## **Rehabilitation Services**

[www.msk.org/rehabilitation](http://www.msk.org/rehabilitation)

Cancers and cancer treatments can make your body feel weak, stiff, or tight. Some can cause lymphedema (swelling). Our physiatrists (rehabilitation medicine doctors), occupational therapists (OTs), and physical therapists (PTs) can help you get back to your usual activities.

- **Rehabilitation medicine doctors** diagnose and treat problems that affect how you move and do activities. They can design and help coordinate your rehabilitation therapy program, either at MSK or somewhere closer to home. Call Rehabilitation Medicine (Physiatry) at 646-888-1929 to learn more.
- An **OT** can help if you're having trouble doing usual daily activities. For example, they can recommend tools to help make daily tasks easier. A **PT** can teach you exercises to help build strength and flexibility. Call Rehabilitation Therapy at 646-888-1900 to learn more.

## **Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) Program**

646-888-8106

At MSK, care does not end after your treatment. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment.

This program has many services. We offer seminars, workshops, support groups, and counseling on life after treatment. We can also help with insurance and employment issues.

## **Sexual Health Programs**

Cancer and cancer treatments can affect your sexual health, fertility, or both. MSK's sexual health programs can help you before, during, or after your treatment.

- Our **Female Sexual Medicine and Women's Health Program** can help with sexual health problems such as premature menopause or fertility issues. Ask a member of your MSK care team for a referral or call 646-888-5076 to learn more.
- Our **Male Sexual and Reproductive Medicine Program** can help with sexual health problems such as erectile dysfunction (ED). Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call 646-888-6024 to learn more.

## **Social Work**

[www.msk.org/socialwork](http://www.msk.org/socialwork)

212-639-7020

Social workers help patients, families, and friends deal with common issues for people who have cancer. They provide individual counseling and support groups throughout your treatment. They can help you communicate with children and other family members.

Our social workers can also help refer you to community agencies and programs. If you're having trouble paying your bills, they also have information about financial resources. Call the number above to learn more.

## **Spiritual Care**

212-639-5982

Our chaplains (spiritual counselors) are available to listen, help support family members, and pray. They can contact community clergy or faith groups, or simply be a comforting companion and a spiritual presence. Anyone can ask for spiritual support. You do not have to have a religious affiliation (connection to a religion).

MSK's interfaith chapel is located near Memorial Hospital's main lobby. It's open 24 hours a day. If you have an emergency, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the chaplain on call.

## **Tobacco Treatment Program**

[www.msk.org/tobacco](http://www.msk.org/tobacco)

212-610-0507

If you want to quit smoking, MSK has specialists who can help. Call to learn more.

## **Virtual Programs**

[www.msk.org/vp](http://www.msk.org/vp)

We offer online education and support for patients and caregivers. These are live sessions where you can talk or just listen. You can learn about your diagnosis, what to expect during treatment, and how to prepare for your cancer care.

Sessions are private, free, and led by experts. Visit our website to learn more about Virtual Programs or to register.

# **External support services**

There are many other services available to help you before, during, and after your cancer treatment. Some offer support groups and information. Others can help with transportation, lodging, and treatment costs.

Visit [www.msk.org/pe/external-support-services](http://www.msk.org/pe/external-support-services) for a list of these support services. You can also call 212-639-7020 to talk with an MSK social worker.



These are the educational resources that were mentioned in this guide. You can find them online or ask a member of your care team for a printed copy.

- ***A Guide for Caregivers*** ([www.msk.org/pe/guide-caregivers](http://www.msk.org/pe/guide-caregivers))
- ***Advance Care Planning for People With Cancer and Their Loved Ones*** ([www.msk.org/pe/advance-care-planning](http://www.msk.org/pe/advance-care-planning))
- ***Call! Don't Fall!*** ([www.msk.org/pe/call-dont-fall](http://www.msk.org/pe/call-dont-fall))
- ***Clear Liquid Diet*** ([www.msk.org/pe/clear-liquid-diet](http://www.msk.org/pe/clear-liquid-diet))
- ***Diet and Nutrition Before and After Your Gastrectomy*** ([www.msk.org/pe/diet-gastrectomy](http://www.msk.org/pe/diet-gastrectomy))
- ***Eating and Drinking Before Your Surgery or Procedure When Taking GLP-1 Medicines*** ([www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1](http://www.msk.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1))
- ***Frequently Asked Questions About Walking After Your Surgery*** ([www.msk.org/pe/walking-after-surgery](http://www.msk.org/pe/walking-after-surgery))
- ***Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment*** ([www.msk.org/pe/herbal-remedies](http://www.msk.org/pe/herbal-remedies))
- ***How to Be a Health Care Agent*** ([www.msk.org/pe/health-care-agent](http://www.msk.org/pe/health-care-agent))
- ***How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*** ([www.msk.org/pe/check-med-supplement](http://www.msk.org/pe/check-med-supplement))
- ***How To Use Your Incentive Spirometer*** ([www.msk.org/pe/incentive-spirometer](http://www.msk.org/pe/incentive-spirometer))
- ***Information for Family and Friends for the Day of Surgery*** ([www.msk.org/pe/info-family-friends](http://www.msk.org/pe/info-family-friends))
- ***Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA)*** ([www.msk.org/pe/pca](http://www.msk.org/pe/pca))
- ***What You Can Do to Avoid Falling*** ([www.msk.org/pe/avoid-falling](http://www.msk.org/pe/avoid-falling))



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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment

This information explains herbal remedies and how they can affect your treatment.

## About Herbal Remedies

Herbal remedies are any herbs, botanical (plant-based) supplements, or dietary supplements you take for their health benefits. These may come as tablets, capsules, powders, teas, liquid extracts, and fresh or dried plants.

Some herbal remedies can help prevent or manage side effects of cancer or your treatment. The herbal remedies that can help you depend on what symptoms you have and what treatment you're getting.

Even though herbal remedies can feel safe, they may not all be safe. Herbal remedies do not go through the same testing as prescription medications to make sure they work and are safe.

Some herbal remedies may be harmful. This is because they can:

- Affect how your other medications work.
- Raise or lower your blood pressure.
- Thin your blood and increase your risk of bleeding.
- Keep radiation therapy from working as well as it should.
- Change how your body reacts to sedation (medication to make you calmer) or general anesthesia (medication to make you sleepy).

Talk with your healthcare provider about any herbal remedies or other

supplements you are taking. They can provide an open and safe space to talk about these products.

For more information about herbs and supplements, visit [www.aboutherbs.com](http://www.aboutherbs.com) or call MSK's Integrative Medicine Service at 646-608-8550.

## **Stop taking herbal remedies before your treatment**

**Stop taking herbal remedies and other dietary supplements 7 days (1 week) before you:**

- Have surgery.
- Start chemotherapy.
- Start radiation therapy.
- Have certain procedures. Your healthcare provider will let you know if you need to stop taking herbal remedies before your procedure.

Herbal remedies and other dietary supplements can cause bleeding and affect your treatment. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for when to restart taking herbal remedies.

You can still use some herbs in your food and drinks, such as using spices in cooking and drinking tea. Herbal remedies are stronger than the herbs you cook with.

## **Common Herbal Remedies and Their Effects**

These are some commonly used herbs and their side effects on cancer treatments.

### **Echinacea (EH-kih-NAY-shuh)**

- Can cause rare but serious allergic reactions, such as a rash or trouble breathing.
- Can keep medications that weaken your immune system from working as well as they should.

## **Garlic**

- Can lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Can increase your risk of bleeding.

## **Gingko (also known as Gingko biloba)**

- Can increase your risk of bleeding.

## **Ginseng (JIN-seng)**

- Can keep sedation or general anesthesia from working as well as they should.
- Can increase your blood pressure.
- Can increase your risk of bleeding.
- Can lower your blood glucose (sugar) level.

## **Turmeric (TER-mayr-ik)**

- Can keep chemotherapy from working as well as it should.

## **St. John's Wort**

- Can keep some medications from working as well as they should.
- Can make your skin more sensitive to radiation or laser treatment.

## **Valerian (vuh-LEER-ee-un)**

- Can make sedation or general anesthesia affect you more than they should.

## **Herbal formulas**

- Herbal formulas contain many different herbs and dosages.
- Stop taking these products 7 days (1 week) before treatment. Do not start taking herbal formulas again until your healthcare provider tells you it is safe.

This information does not cover all herbal remedies or possible side effects. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

## Contact Information

- To schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in Integrative Medicine, call 646-608-8550.
- To make an appointment for Integrative Medicine Service's therapies, classes, and workshops, call 646-449-1010.

For more information, visit [www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine) or read *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative\\_therapies](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies)).

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment - Last updated on May 5, 2022

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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil

This information will help you check if your medicines or dietary supplements have aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil as an active ingredient. NSAID stands for nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug.

It's important to stop taking these medicines and supplements before many cancer treatments. They affect your platelets (blood cells that clot to prevent bleeding) and can raise your risk of bleeding.

Other dietary supplements, such as vitamins and herbal remedies, can also affect your cancer treatment. Read *Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/herbal\\_remedies](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/herbal_remedies)) to learn more.

**Make sure your healthcare provider always knows all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines and supplements you're taking.** This includes patches and creams.

A prescription medicine is one you can only get with a prescription from your healthcare provider. An over-the-counter medicine is one you can buy without a prescription.

# What is an active ingredient?

An active ingredient is the part of a medicine or supplement that makes it work. Some medicines and supplements have just one active ingredient. Others have more. For example:

- Ibuprofen is the active ingredient in Advil® and Motrin®. Ibuprofen is an NSAID.
- Naproxen is the active ingredient in Aleve®. Naproxen is an NSAID.
- Acetaminophen is the active ingredient in Tylenol®.
- Aspirin, acetaminophen, and caffeine are the active ingredients in Excedrin®.

Generic medicines sometimes use their active ingredient as their name. But people often call medicines and supplements by a brand name, even if they're generic. This can make it hard to know their active ingredients.

## How to find a medicine or supplement's active ingredients

You can always find the active ingredients by reading the label.

### Over-the-counter medicines

Over-the-counter medicines list their active ingredients in the "Drug Facts" label (see Figure 1). Active ingredients are always the first thing on the Drug Facts label.

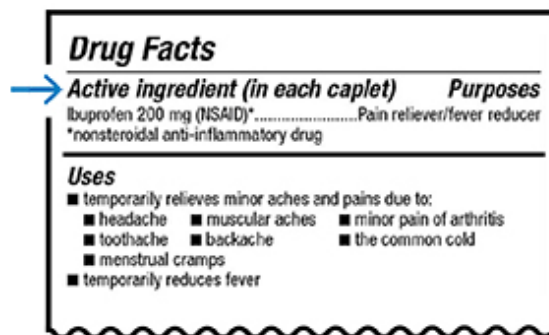


Figure 1. Active ingredients on an over-the-counter medicine label

# Prescription medicines

Prescription medicines list their active ingredients on the label. Their active ingredients and their generic name are the same thing.

Labels often look different depending on which pharmacy you use. Here’s an example of where to find a medicine’s active ingredients (generic name) on a label from MSK’s pharmacy (see Figure 2).

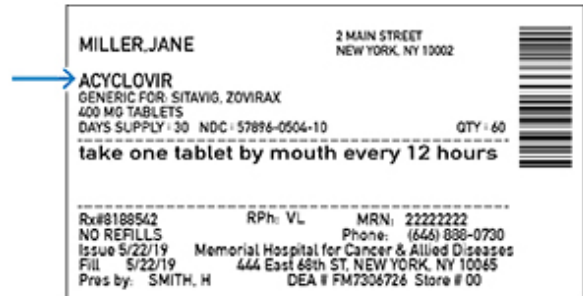


Figure 2. Active ingredients on a prescription medicine label

# Dietary supplements

Dietary supplements list their active ingredients in the “Supplement Facts” label (see Figure 3). The active ingredients always have an amount per serving and % daily value included.

	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Vitamin A (as retinyl acetate and 50% as beta-carotene)	5000 IU	100%
Vitamin C (as ascorbic acid)	60 mg	100%
Vitamin D (as cholecalciferol)	400 IU	100%
Vitamin E (as di-alpha tocopheryl acetate)	90 IU	100%
Thiamin (as thiamin mononitrate)	1.5 mg	100%
Riboflavin	1.7 mg	100%
Niacin (as niacinamide)	20 mg	100%
Vitamin B <sub>6</sub> (as pyridoxine hydrochloride)	2.0 mg	100%
Folate (as folic acid)	400 mcg	100%
Vitamin B <sub>12</sub> (as cyanocobalamin)	6 mcg	100%
Biotin	30 mcg	10%
Pantothenic Acid (as calcium pantothenate)	10 mg	100%

Other ingredients: Gelatin, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, FD&C Yellow No. 6, propylene glycol, propylparaben, and sodium benzoate.

Figure 3. Active ingredients on a supplement label

## Active ingredients to look for

If your medicine or supplement has any of these active ingredients, you may need to stop taking it before, during, or after your cancer treatment or surgery. Follow your care team's instructions.

Active ingredients to look for		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acetylsalicylic acid</li><li>• Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)</li><li>• Aspirin</li><li>• Acetaminophen*</li><li>• Celecoxib</li><li>• Diclofenac</li><li>• Diflunisal</li><li>• Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)</li><li>• Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Etodolac</li><li>• Fish oil</li><li>• Fenoprofen Flurbiprofen</li><li>• Ibuprofen</li><li>• Indomethacin</li><li>• Ketoprofen</li><li>• Ketorolac</li><li>• Meclofenamate</li><li>• Mefenamic acid</li><li>• Meloxicam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nabumetone</li><li>• Naproxen</li><li>• Omega-3 fatty acids</li><li>• Omega-6 fatty acids</li><li>• Oxaprozin</li><li>• Piroxicam</li><li>• Sulindac</li><li>• Tolmetin</li><li>• Vitamin E</li></ul>

\* The full name acetaminophen isn't always written out. Look for the common abbreviations listed below, especially on prescription pain relievers.

Common abbreviations for acetaminophen		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• APAP</li><li>• Acetamin</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AC</li><li>• Acetam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acetaminop</li><li>• Acetaminoph</li></ul>

## About acetaminophen (Tylenol)

In general, acetaminophen is safe to take during cancer treatment. It doesn't affect platelets. That means it will not raise your chance of bleeding. If you're getting chemotherapy, talk with your healthcare provider before taking acetaminophen.

There is a limit to how much acetaminophen you can take in a day. Always follow the instructions from your care team or on the medicine's label.

Acetaminophen is in many different prescription and over-the-counter medicines. It's possible to take too much without knowing. **Always read the label on the medicines you take.** Do not take more than 1 medicine that has acetaminophen at a time without talking with a member of your care team.

## **Instructions before your cancer treatment**

Tell your healthcare provider if you take aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil. They'll tell you if you need to stop taking it. You'll also find instructions in the information about your treatment.

### **Before your surgery**

Follow these instructions if you're having surgery or a surgical procedure. **If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.**

- If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to change your dose or stop taking it 7 days before your surgery. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless your healthcare provider tells you to.**
- If you take vitamin E, fish oil, or a supplement that has vitamin E or fish oil, stop taking it 7 days before your surgery or as directed by your healthcare provider.
- If you take an NSAID or a medicine that has an NSAID, stop taking it 48 hours (2 days) before your surgery or as directed by your healthcare provider.

## Before your radiology procedure

Follow these instructions if you're having a radiology procedure (including Interventional Radiology, Interventional Mammography, Breast Imaging, and General Radiology). **If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.**

- If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to stop taking it 5 days before your procedure. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless your healthcare provider tells you to.**
- If you take an NSAID or a medicine that has an NSAID, you may need to stop taking it 24 hours (1 day) before your procedure. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions.

## Before and during your chemotherapy

Chemotherapy can lower your platelet count, which can increase your risk of bleeding. No matter if you're just starting chemotherapy or have been getting it, talk with your healthcare provider before taking aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil - Last updated on November 29, 2023

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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# How To Use Your Incentive Spirometer

This information will help you learn how to use your incentive spirometer (in-SEN-tiv spy-rah-MEE-ter). It also answers some common questions about it.

## About your incentive spirometer

After your surgery you may feel weak and sore, and it may be uncomfortable to take deep breaths. Your healthcare provider may recommend using a device called an incentive spirometer (see Figure 1). It helps you practice taking deep breaths.

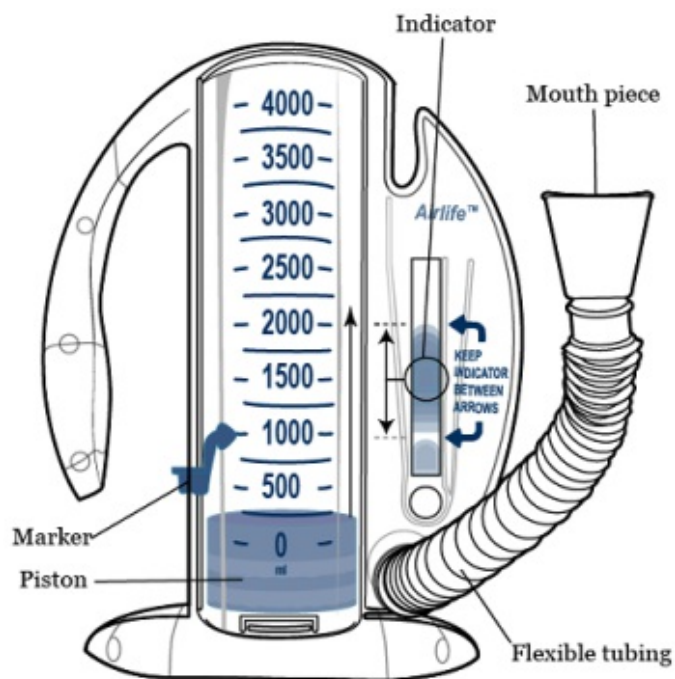


Figure 1. Parts of an incentive spirometer

It's important to use your incentive spirometer after your surgery. Using an incentive spirometer:

- Helps your lungs expand so you can take deep, full breaths.
- Exercises your lungs and makes them stronger as you heal from surgery.

**If you have a respiratory infection, do not use your incentive spirometer around other people.** A respiratory infection is an infection in your nose, throat, or lungs, such as pneumonia (noo-MOH-nyuh) or COVID-19. This kind of infection can spread from person to person through the air.

## How to use your incentive spirometer

Here is a video that shows how to use your incentive spirometer:



Please visit [www.mskcc.org/pe/incentive\\_spirometer\\_video](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/incentive_spirometer_video) to watch this video.

### Setting up your incentive spirometer

Before you use your incentive spirometer for the first time, you will need to set it up. First, take the flexible (bendable) tubing out of the bag and stretch it out. Then, connect the tubing to the outlet on the right side of the base (see Figure 1). The mouthpiece is attached to the other end of the tubing.

### Knowing what number to aim for on your incentive spirometer

Your healthcare provider will teach you how to use your incentive spirometer before you leave the hospital. They will help you set a goal and tell you what number to aim for when using your spirometer. If a goal was not set for you, talk with your healthcare provider. Ask them what number you should aim for.

You can also check the package your incentive spirometer came in. It may have a chart to help you figure out what number to aim for. To learn more, read "What number I should aim for?" in the "Common questions about your

incentive spirometer” section.

## **Using your incentive spirometer**

When using your incentive spirometer, make sure to breathe through your mouth. If you breathe through your nose, your spirometer will not work right.

Follow these steps to use your incentive spirometer. Repeat these steps every hour you’re awake. Follow the instructions from your healthcare provider if they’re different from the ones here.

1. Sit upright in a chair or in bed. Hold your incentive spirometer at eye level.
2. Put the mouthpiece in your mouth and close your lips tightly around it. Make sure you do not block the mouthpiece with your tongue.
3. With the mouthpiece in your mouth, breathe out (exhale) slowly and fully.
  - Some people may have trouble exhaling with the mouthpiece in their mouth. If you do, take the mouthpiece out of your mouth, and then exhale slowly and fully. After you exhale, put the mouthpiece back in your mouth and go on to step 4.
4. Breathe in (inhale) slowly through your mouth, as deeply as you can. You will see the piston slowly rise inside the spirometer. The deeper you breathe in, the higher the piston will rise.
5. As the piston rises, the coaching indicator on the right side of the spirometer should also rise. It should float between the 2 arrows (see Figure 1).
  - The coaching indicator measures the speed of your breath. If it does not stay between the 2 arrows, you’re breathing in either too fast or too slow.
    - If the indicator rises above the higher arrow, you’re breathing in too fast. Try to breathe in slower.
    - If the indicator stays below the lower arrow, you’re breathing in too slow. Try to breathe in faster.

6. When you cannot breathe in any further, hold your breath for at least 3 to 5 seconds. Hold it for longer if you can. You will see the piston slowly fall to the bottom of the spirometer.
7. Once the piston reaches the bottom of the spirometer, breathe out slowly and fully through your mouth. If you want, you can take the mouthpiece out of your mouth first and then breathe out.
8. Rest for a few seconds. If you took the mouthpiece out of your mouth, put it back in when you're ready to start again.
9. Repeat steps 1 to 8 at least 10 times. Try to get the piston to the same level with each breath. After you have done the exercise 10 times, go on to step 10.
10. Use the marker on the left side of the spirometer to mark how high the piston rises (see Figure 1). **Look at the very top of the piston, not the bottom. The number you see at the top is the highest number the piston reached. Put the marker there.** This is how high you should try to get the piston the next time you use your spirometer.
  - Write down the highest number the piston reached. This can help you change your goals and track your progress over time.

**Take 10 breaths with your incentive spirometer every hour you're awake.**

Cover the mouthpiece of your incentive spirometer when you're not using it.

## **Tips for using your incentive spirometer**

Follow these tips when using your incentive spirometer:

- If you had surgery on your chest or abdomen (belly), it may help to splint your incision (surgical cut). To do this, hold a pillow firmly against your incision. This will keep your muscles from moving as much while you're using your incentive spirometer. It will also help ease pain at your incision.
- If you need to clear your lungs, you can try to cough a few times. As

you're coughing, hold a pillow against your incision, as needed.

- If you feel dizzy or lightheaded, take the mouthpiece out of your mouth. Then, take a few normal breaths. Stop and rest for a while, if needed. When you feel better, you can go back to using your incentive spirometer.
- You may find it hard to use your incentive spirometer at first. If you cannot make the piston rise to the number your healthcare provider set for you, it's OK. Reaching your goal takes time and practice. It's important to keep using your spirometer as you heal from surgery. The more you practice, the stronger your lungs will get.

## **Common questions about your incentive spirometer**

### **How often should I use my incentive spirometer?**

How often you will need to use your incentive spirometer is not the same for everyone. It depends on the type of surgery you had and your recovery process.

Most people can take 10 breaths with their spirometer every hour they're awake.

Your healthcare provider will tell you how often to use your spirometer. Follow their instructions.

### **How long after my surgery will I need to use my incentive spirometer?**

The length of time you will need to use your incentive spirometer is not the same for everyone. It depends on the type of surgery you had and your recovery process.

Your healthcare provider will tell you how long you need to use your spirometer. Follow their instructions.

## **How do I clean my incentive spirometer?**

An incentive spirometer is a disposable device and only meant to be used for a short time. Because of this, you may not find cleaning instructions in the package your spirometer came in. If you have questions about cleaning your spirometer, talk with your healthcare provider.

## **What do the numbers on my incentive spirometer measure?**

The large column of your incentive spirometer has numbers on it (see Figure 1). These numbers measure the volume of your breath in milliliters (mL) or cubic centimeters (cc). The volume of your breath is how much air you can breathe into your lungs (inhale).

For example, if the piston rises to 1500, it means you can inhale 1500 mL or cc of air. The higher the number, the more air you're able to inhale, and the better your lungs are working.

## **What number I should aim for?**

The number you should aim for depends on your age, height, and sex. It also depends on the type of surgery you had and your recovery process. Your healthcare provider will look at these things when setting a goal for you. They will tell you what number to aim for.

Most people start with a goal of 500 mL or cc. Your healthcare provider may change your goal and have you aim for higher numbers as you heal from surgery.

The package your incentive spirometer came in may have a chart. You can use the chart to set your goal based on your age, height, and sex. If you cannot find this information, ask your healthcare provider what your goal should be.

## What does the coaching indicator on my incentive spirometer measure?

The coaching indicator on your incentive spirometer measures the speed of your breath. As the speed of your breath changes, the indicator moves up and down.

Use the indicator to guide your breathing. If the indicator rises above the higher arrow, it means you're breathing in too fast. If the indicator stays below the lower arrow, it means you're breathing in too slow.

Aim to keep the indicator between the 2 arrows (see Figure 1). This means your breath is steady and controlled.

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of these when using your incentive spirometer:

- Feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- Pain in your lungs or chest.
- Severe (very bad) pain when you take deep breaths.
- Trouble breathing.
- Coughing up blood.
- Fluid or blood coming from your incision site when you cough.
- Trouble using your spirometer for any reason.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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