



# How Can I Prepare for Heart Surgery?

---

Doctors do successful heart surgery every day, but it's normal to be concerned if you're scheduled for the operation. Knowing what to expect will ease your worries.



---

## What should I do before my operation?

- You'll probably be admitted to the hospital the afternoon before your operation. The staff will do some tests, give you instructions and prepare you for surgery.
- Your healthcare team (surgeons, cardiologists, anesthesiologists, nurses and therapists) will visit you to discuss your operation. This is a good time to ask questions and voice any concerns you may have.
- You may need some routine tests or procedures, such as an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) and chest X-ray.
- Hair will be shaved off where the operation will be done. That makes it easier to clean the skin and prevents pain when adhesive bandages are removed. Your skin will be washed with antiseptic soap to reduce risk of infection.
- Technicians will draw blood for laboratory tests and to cross-match for donor blood. Modern operating methods, however, reduce blood loss and transfusions are done as seldom as possible.

---

## What will happen on the day of my operation?

- Give your glasses, dentures, watch, jewelry, contact lenses, clothing and other personal items to family members.
- About an hour before your operation, you'll get medications to help you rest comfortably.
- Attendants will wheel you to the operating room on a rolling bed. You'll probably be awake enough to move between the hospital room bed and your rolling bed, but you may not remember doing it.
- Heart operations are usually planned in advance and start on time, but sometimes an emergency may delay them.

---

## What happens in the operation room?

- The anesthesiologist will give you anesthesia to bring deep sleep, freedom from pain and to leave you with no memory of the operation.
- Heart operations usually take 3–5 hours. The length usually depends on how complex the operation is.
- Your family and friends should stay in the waiting room so the surgeon can find them to keep them informed.
- After the operation, you will be moved to the intensive care unit (ICU) or a recovery room for your recovery to begin.

---

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

---

## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

---

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

What should I bring to the hospital?

Will this affect my medication regimen?

