

Take Control of Your Post-Op Pain Control

Questions to Ask Your Doctor Before Surgery to Ensure a Smooth Recovery

There are all kinds of questions to consider when planning for an upcoming surgery. How will you get there and back? Who will help with your kids and other aspects of your daily life? How much time will you need off from work? But there is one very important question that may not be on your radar — **How will your pain be managed?**

In addition to keeping you comfortable, good pain control can help your recovery, reduce the chance of complications and unwanted side effects from your medications, and prevent the pain from becoming chronic.

Although opioids (also called “prescription painkillers” or “narcotics”) are often associated with pain control after surgery, these potent medications can also cause unwanted side effects like nausea, constipation, and vomiting. Further, their use carries avoidable risks such as dependence, abuse, and addiction.

The good news is doctors today are increasingly practicing “multimodal pain control,” which means they are using several different types of pain relieving treatments in combination. A multimodal approach varies the types of pain medicines used, so your doctor can avoid exposing you to very high doses of any one medication, which can help reduce your chances of experiencing side effects.

While there are many different combinations of treatments that can go into a multimodal plan, the trend is to use non-opioid medications at the start of treatment to limit (or in some cases eliminate) your need for opioids.

When it comes to postsurgical pain control, it’s important to start the dialogue well before your procedure date. Be as open and honest as possible about any concerns you may have, and don’t be afraid to ask for alternative options, including non-opioids.

The questions below can help you start a discussion with your provider about a pain management plan that’s right for you.



How much discomfort is usually associated with this procedure? Where your surgery is, how it’s done, and how your body responds to pain medications can all affect how you feel. Ask your doctor what you can expect.



How will my postsurgical pain be managed? There are many options to help control pain after surgery. Ask your doctor what the plan is for you.



How can I minimize the need for opioids? What non-opioid options do I have? There are a variety of medications your surgeon may administer before, during, and after surgery to minimize your need for opioids, including local anesthetics that can be used to numb the area where you had your procedure.



What do you need to know about me to help customize my pain management? Your medical history (e.g., medication allergies, breathing/respiratory issues, stomach/GI issues, previous history of substance abuse, current medications you are taking, etc.) will help your surgeon better understand your treatment needs.



What happens when the medications from my surgery wear off and how will my pain be managed at home? The kinds of medications you receive can depend on the type of procedure you have. Talk with your doctor to find out more about what you’ll feel from the medications used during and after your surgery.



What can I expect in the first few days after my procedure? This can help you understand how long it might take for you to get back to doing and eating the things you love.



What can help my recovery? There may be things you can do on your own that can help speed your recovery. Find out if there’s anything you can do.