



How Can I Prepare for Heart Surgery?

Doctors who specialize in hearts, known as cardiothoracic surgeons, do these surgeries in hospitals. They work with a team of other health care professionals to take care of you before, during and after your surgery.

The type of surgery you need depends on your heart condition and how healthy you are. It could be a small surgery with tiny cuts (minimally invasive) or a more involved surgery where a surgeon opens your chest.

Successful heart surgeries are done every day. But it's normal to be concerned if you're having an operation. Knowing what to expect can help ease your worries.



What should I do before my surgery?

- You may go to the hospital the afternoon before or the morning of your surgery. Your health care team will run some tests, give you instructions and get you ready for the operation.
- Your team (surgeons, cardiologists, anesthesiologists, nurses, imaging technicians and therapists) will visit you to discuss your operation. This is a good time to ask questions and share any worries you may have.
- You might need some routine tests or procedures, such as an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) and chest X-ray.
- A member of your health care team will remove any hair at the surgery site. That way they can easily clean the skin before surgery. Removing the hair also reduces pain when taking off bandages as you are healing after your procedure. They will also wash your skin with special soap to lower your risk of infection.
- Technicians will take blood samples for lab tests and to match donor blood, if needed. However, modern surgical techniques reduce blood loss, so blood transfusions are needed less often.

- You won't be allowed to eat or drink anything after midnight before your surgery.
- You might be told not to take certain medicines, such as aspirin, that can affect blood clotting.

What happens on the day of my surgery?

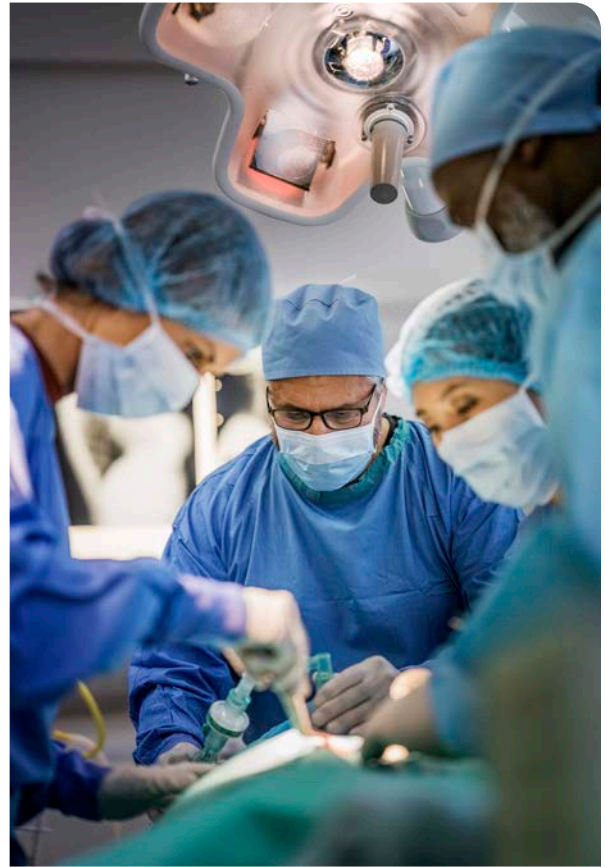
- You should give your glasses, dentures, watch, jewelry, contact lenses, clothing, phone, wallet and other personal items to your family or a friend.
- You'll get medicines to help you relax and feel comfortable about an hour before your surgery.
- Attendants will take you to the operating room on a bed with wheels. You'll likely be awake enough to move from your hospital bed to the rolling bed, but you might not remember it.
- Your operation should start on time because heart surgeries are usually planned in advance. But there could be a delay due to an emergency.

(continued)



What happens during heart surgery?

- You will be given anesthesia to help you sleep, not feel pain and not remember the operation.
- Heart surgeries usually take three to five hours. The length depends on the complexity of the procedure.
- For open-heart surgery, the doctor will make a cut about six to eight inches long in the middle of your chest. Then they will cut your breastbone and open your rib cage to get to your heart.
- Some procedures can be done better when the heart is not beating and blood is not flowing through it. In these situations, the doctor will connect a special machine called a heart-lung bypass machine to your heart. This machine will pump your blood for your heart.
- For a less invasive surgery, your doctor will make small cuts on the side of the chest between the ribs. They will work on the heart using tiny tools inserted through the small cuts. These types of surgeries have a shorter recovery time.
- During any heart surgery, you will get medicine to make your blood thinner and prevent it from clotting.
- Your family and friends should stay in the waiting room so the surgeon can easily find them to keep them updated.
- After the operation, you will be moved to the intensive care unit, also known as the ICU, or a recovery room to start your recovery process.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What should I bring to the hospital?

Will this affect my medication regimen?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.