

Safe Surgery for Frail Patients

What does it mean to be frail?

During your visit with your surgeon, you were screened for frailty.

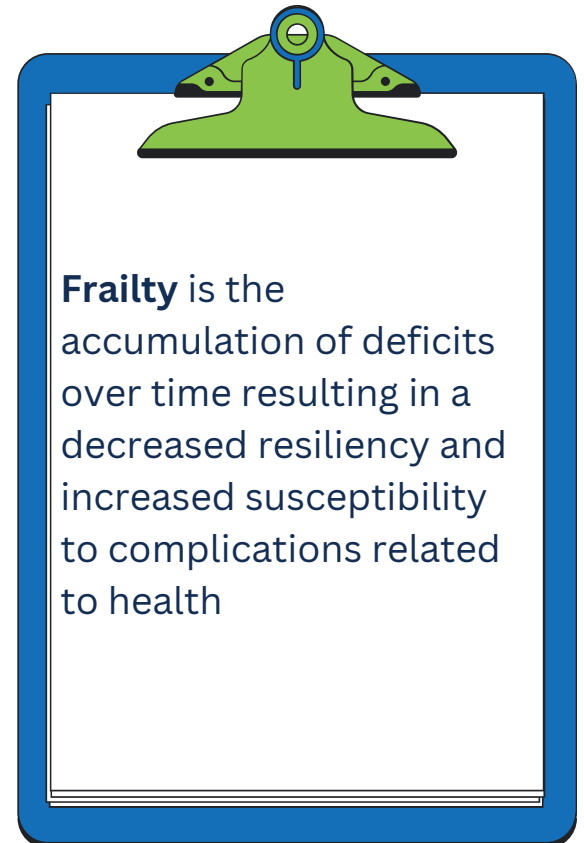
Over time, we all become more frail. This can make it more difficult to heal and recover either physically or mentally from illness or injury, including surgery. There are things we can do to reduce that risk and improve your chances of a good recovery after your surgery.

Your medical team determined that you have begun to show signs of frailty.

This does not mean you will have a bad outcome from surgery, but it does provide an important opportunity for your healthcare team to make recommendations to help you think carefully about your surgery and to ensure you have the best possible chance for a complete and uneventful recovery.

Knowing that you may be more frail than you used to be, before surgery is a good time to communicate with everyone caring and supporting you that you may have a higher risk and may need additional monitoring and assistance to heal. It is also a good time to maximize your health status by tackling any issues that can be improved. Any improvement in your overall health will greatly help your

This guide provides general information about things most people can safely do to improve their overall situation. You should talk with your doctors and healthcare providers in more detail about what your frailty status might mean and discuss the specifics of your own health. Learn what you can do to improve your health status.



Preoperative Stage

The time between deciding that surgery is the best treatment option for you and the date of your operation is called the preoperative stage. In this stage, you can take steps to improve your overall health, establish healthy and effective communication with your healthcare team, and work to manage any underlying health issues as well as you possibly can. Doing these things will help to prepare you and your caregivers emotionally and physically for the stress of surgery and ensure your wishes and needs are being addressed by your healthcare team at all times.

Before your surgery (Preop) For Frail Patients

1. Identify your support system

When deciding to move forward with surgery, the first thing you should do is talk to your family and friends about how willing and able they are to help you during your hospital stay and after you go home. Surgery is a major event and you are going to require help with both small and large tasks as you recover. Ask your surgeon what limitations or restrictions you will have after your operation. Having people you know able to support you through recovery will make it easier, may decrease the risk of complications, and decrease the time you need to get back to your desired level of functioning.

If your surgery will require you to stay in the hospital, your recovery can be made much easier if friends, family and support people are able to visit or stay with you while you are there. Seeing familiar faces is reassuring. People who know you well are able to advocate for you, speak when you cannot, provide insight and tools to the doctors, nurses and support staff caring for you, and help you navigate the system while you may be receiving medications or treatments that leave you confused or disoriented at times.

2. Identify your goals

Identify and review with your surgical team what your overall health and lifestyle goals are as well as your goals specific to your surgery.

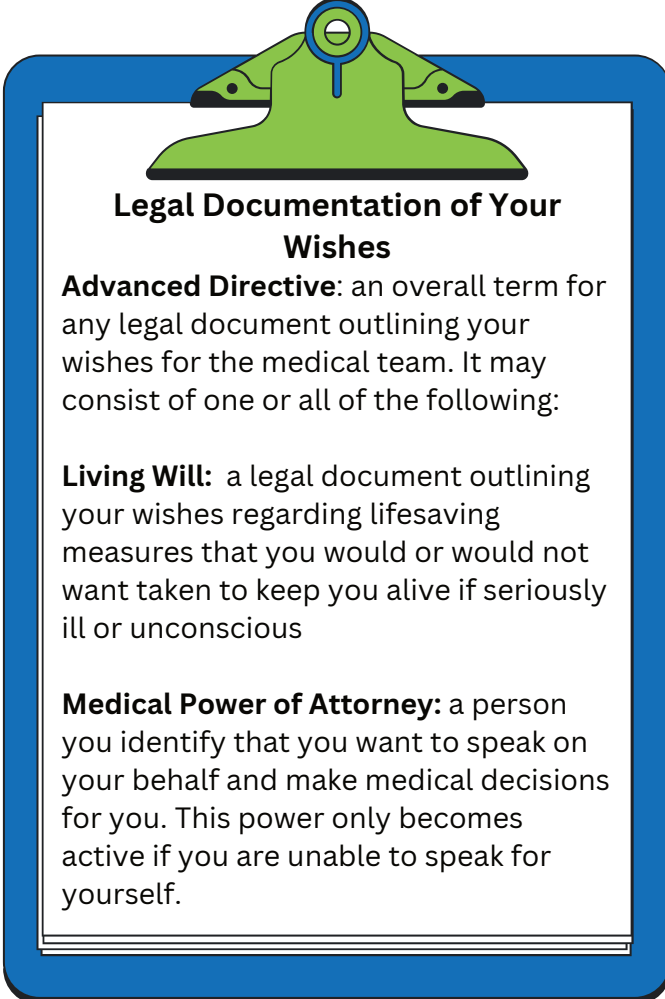
Is living independently extremely important to you? Do you need to care for a loved one or have other obligations that are important to you, such as caring for pets?

Discussing these situations and how they affect your overall goals and wishes with your healthcare team is vitally important to ensuring everyone involved is able to care for you in a way that keeps in mind those things that are most important to your quality of life.

3. Write your wishes down

Advanced Directives are statements of your wishes and decision-making regarding your care. An advanced directive is sometimes called a healthcare proxy or living will. It is an official document that outlines your wishes in the event you are unable to communicate for yourself. It may also identify the people you would want to speak for you, who are familiar with your wishes, in the event you cannot speak for yourself.

If you have never filled out an Advanced Directive, talk to your healthcare team about completing one prior to your surgery. If you have an Advanced Directive already, review it to ensure still reflects your wishes. Make sure an updated copy is on file in your medical record before your surgery date.



Legal Documentation of Your Wishes

Advanced Directive: an overall term for any legal document outlining your wishes for the medical team. It may consist of one or all of the following:

Living Will: a legal document outlining your wishes regarding lifesaving measures that you would or would not want taken to keep you alive if seriously ill or unconscious

Medical Power of Attorney: a person you identify that you want to speak on your behalf and make medical decisions for you. This power only becomes active if you are unable to speak for yourself.

4. Take Control of your medical conditions

If you are being treated for any medical problems or issues, you should tell the provider(s) who treat you for them that you are having surgery. Talk to your provider about any steps you can take to improve your control of these conditions. The better controlled your underlying health is, the better you will be able to recover from surgery.

Be sure your surgeon knows all of your medical history and has a complete list of every medicine you take, even non-prescription ones, vitamin supplements, and ones you only take if you need them. Identify medications that cause allergic reactions or side effects, Some medications may need to be stopped before surgery or doses adjusted afterwards. Your regular doctors and surgeon may want to talk with each other regarding your treatment to determine the best way to manage your medical conditions after your operation.

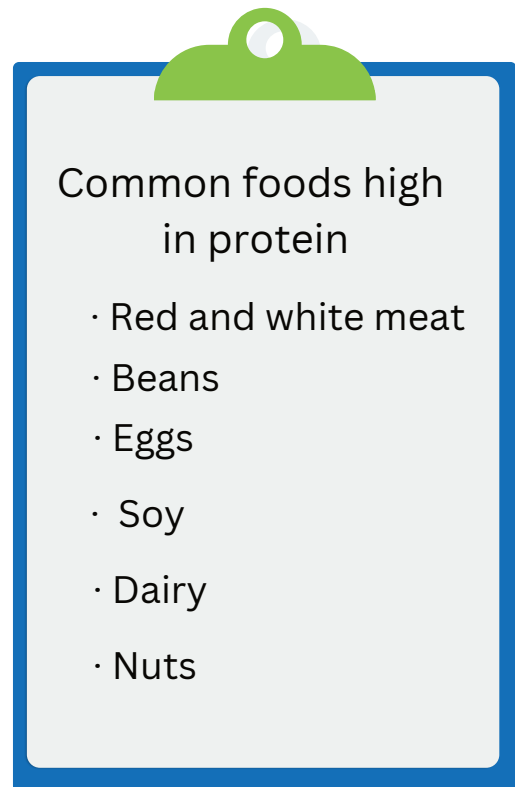
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5. Pay attention to your nutrition

Eating well is important for keeping you healthy. When you are planning for surgery, you will want to make sure your body is well nourished. A balanced diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables is the best way to ensure your body can store all the nutrients you will need as you recover from surgery.

Protein is one of the main types of nutrition needed for to heal properly after surgery.

Protein helps rebuild tissue that may be damaged due to surgery or illness. Increasing the amount of protein in your diet before surgery allows you to have plenty of stores needed to help healing.



Vitamins and minerals from fruits and vegetables are also helpful for proper healing. Eating a varied diet with many different colors and categories of fruits and vegetables will give your body the stores needed for proper healing.

It is best to get nutrition from whole (i.e., not processed) foods as much as possible. This means eating lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and whole grains.

For some people, medical problems, or even financial or social concerns, can make eating a healthy diet much harder than it sounds. If you have difficulty accessing a varied diet or taking in enough nutrition to properly support your needs, talk to your healthcare team to see what solutions are available.

Social workers or case managers may be able to help you access community support systems if finances or access to healthy food is a problem.

If there are concerns about your diet, your doctor or surgeon may refer you to a Registered Dietician who could evaluate your current diet and work with you to develop a plan to improve your eating habits. Registered Dieticians can work with you to identify whether supplements or meal replacement drinks would help before and after your surgery. There are a variety of supplements available both over the counter and by prescription that might be appropriate for your situation. Dieticians can also evaluate your nutritional needs related to any chronic health problems you have to ensure you are safe when changing your diet. If you feel an evaluation by a Registered Dietician will be helpful before your surgery, talk with your doctor or surgeon about a referral.

6. Get moving

Increasing your level of physical activity as much as possible before surgery will help your recovery. Exercise does not need to be strenuous to see huge benefits. Walking every day, for example, will help improve your blood circulation, make your heart healthier, and open up your lungs. This can help avoid serious complications after surgery, such as blood clots or pneumonia. Any increase in daily activity, no matter how small, will improve your chances of avoiding both big and small problems after surgery.

As you increase your activity, be sure to use any assistive devices (such as a walker or cane, eyeglasses, special footwear, etc.) properly. Walk in areas free from clutter or trip hazards. Walk inside if conditions outside are unsafe due to weather or if you do not have a safe neighborhood area to walk in. Walking in shopping malls can be a good alternative to outdoor activity. If you have underlying issues that prevent you from exercising safely talk to your family doctor or surgeon about possible alternatives. You may be able to take advantage of specially structured exercise classes or physical therapy prior to surgery to help improve your strength and stamina.

Postoperative period

When your surgery is complete and your surgical team determines you are safe to leave the operating room you enter the Postoperative Period. Your healthcare team will use this phrase to refer to the 30 days after your surgery when most people are back to their own normal or close to it. Sometimes recovery can take longer than this 30 day period, but when you hear the words “postoperative period” the 30 days are what are being referred to.

After your surgery (Post-op) For Frail Patients

1. Waking up from anesthesia

When you wake up from anesthesia, you may be confused and disoriented. If your hospital allows for visitors, having one of your support people present as you wake up can be very helpful. You will need to take out any contact lenses, hearing aids, dentures, or glasses before you go in for surgery. It can be very difficult to wake up from surgery without these things to help you sense where you are. If you can have support people with you while you wake up, ask them to hold these things for you so you can put them back on you as soon as possible. If visitors are not allowed, ask the surgical team if the nurses will return these things to you as you are waking up, especially if you are highly dependent on them to see or hear.

Some people experience confusion while in the hospital. This can be due to effects of anesthesia, lack of sleep, the strangeness of the environment, and medications they are taking. Having a support person available can help reorient you. For most people this disorientation is temporary, but some people have confusion (or delirium) that continues after the surgery and recovery period are over. Unfortunately, there is no accurate way to predict who will develop delirium, but people who are identified as frail have an increased risk.

2. Tubes and lines

There are a variety of devices that may be used during surgery. When you are recovering you may be surprised at how many things are attached to you. Ask your surgical team about any monitors, drains, or specialized equipment you may be expected to need after surgery. Have your support people available for this discussion as well, so they understand what these devices are, what they do, and why they are important. You may not be able to remember everything you were told before surgery, especially when you are first waking up, and your support people or nurses may need to remind you what these are many times as you wake up. Some of these devices may “tether” you to the bed because they are attached to the bed or things around the bed. Any tubes and lines that are not needed will be removed as soon as it is safe, but while they are in you will need to be very careful to not pull them out by mistake.

3. Getting out of bed

Even if you are young and healthy before surgery, getting out of bed after surgery can be dangerous and lead to falls and injuries. You may feel OK lying down but become very dizzy or pass out when you try to sit or stand. You may have tubes that need to be readjusted or equipment that needs to be removed to get out of bed safely. You should never get out of bed without help from the hospital staff before you are told it is OK to do so.

You will need to have something on your feet when you get out of bed. You may bring nonskid footwear (slippers) from home if you want, or the hospital will provide you with special socks that have grips on them. Slips and falls in the hospital can be very dangerous, especially after surgery in frail individuals.

4. Going to the bathroom

After surgery you may have a tube in your bladder that drains the urine into a bag. Sometimes this tube makes you feel like you need to urinate, even though your urine is being collected in the bag. If you have this type of tube, it will be removed as soon as it is no longer needed. It is very important you do not pull this tube out as it can cause damage to you if not removed properly.

If you do not have a tube in your bladder, you may have a urine collection device. This is a piece of material that wicks urine away and collects it in a bag. If you have one of these, you will be able to urinate without getting out of bed and without worrying about getting out of bed. This may be used if you are unsteady on your feet and unable to get to the toilet on time or if the healthcare team needs to know exactly how much urine you are making.

If you feel the need to urinate and you don't have either of these devices, you will be either offered a bedpan or urinal or someone will help you walk to the toilet. It is very important you let your healthcare team know you need assistance and not try to walk alone before you are told this is safe.

Moving your bowels after surgery can be a problem. The medicine you are given to put you to sleep for surgery as well as some pain medicines can cause your bowel function to slow down. This can lead to constipation after surgery. You may be started right away on medicine to help prevent this. It is very important you take this medicine, even if you are not yet having issues. Your surgical team will want to know if you are passing gas and when you have a bowel movement.

5. Pain

Surgery can be very painful, but your healthcare team have many tools to keep your pain under control. If your pain is controlled early, you may not need as many strong pain relievers to keep you comfortable. You might receive medications like Tylenol or Ibuprofen at scheduled times to try and keep your pain minimal. Opioid (narcotic) medications like oxycodone are sometimes needed to manage higher levels of pain. These medications can cause confusion, especially in older patients. If you have had any bad reactions to this type of medication before it is important to let your surgical team know so that

adjustments can be made. Be assured, your care team will manage your pain and not leave you to suffer, but there are side effects to these medications that may occur. Having a support person at the bedside who can notice changes to your mental state is extremely helpful to alert the team if you do not tolerate a medication.

6. Sleep

It is hard to sleep in the hospital. Getting rest can be difficult. Talk with your nurse about what can be done safely to help you sleep as much as possible through the night. Lack of sleep can cause confusion when your body is stressed. If safe, your care team can minimize the number of interruptions you have during the night to help promote uninterrupted rest.

7. Moving about

It is very important that you get out of bed and moving about after surgery as soon as possible. You may need a lot of help to do this safely. Getting up and moving helps to open your lungs up and prevent pneumonia, improves circulation which prevents blood clots, and stops you from losing muscle because of inactivity. Moving around also helps to “wake up” your bowels and can help prevent you from becoming constipated.

Specialized team members like physical therapists and occupational therapists may visit you during your recovery to work with you to get you moving as much as possible while keeping you safe. Your support people can be present during these sessions to learn how to safely help you at home.

If you are not able to get out of bed your nursing team will need to make sure you are repositioned in bed frequently to prevent bedsores. If you can change your position on your own, you should make sure to do this at least every couple of hours. If you cannot move in bed on your own, the nursing team will be helping you change position at least every two hours.

8. Support team

Friends and family members are incredibly important to your healing. They can help communicate to your care team small changes that only someone who knows you would pick up on. They can help to bring you back to reality or comfort you if you become confused. Their long-term knowledge of your history can be incredibly important in developing a treatment plan that will work best for you. Having friends and family at your bedside as much as possible can improve your stay significantly.

Being present in the hospital allows your friends and family to learn about your condition and needs to help when you go home. They also provide vital information to your hospital care team about you when you are unable. Talk with your care team about what visiting policies are in place and discuss with your friends and family how they can best provide you with companionship and support throughout your stay and after you go home.

Talking with your support people about this ahead of time will allow them to make any accommodations needed to provide you with the support you need to be successful.

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Talk About Your Expected Recovery After Discharge

Talk with your surgical team about any restrictions or difficulties they expect following your surgery. Some of these restrictions may impact your ability to care for yourself. You should discuss whether you may require more help after surgery than you require now. People with frailty may need more help at home after leaving the hospital, require a stay at another facility before going home, stay in the hospital longer than other patients having the same surgery, or even be unable to go home after surgery.

There are several different services available to provide extra help to people recovering from a hospital stay.

Home health care: (also known as Visiting Nurses or VNA): If you need special treatments or complicated dressings after surgery you may be enrolled with a Home Health Care Agency. Nurses and therapists will come to your home and help you with care and even therapy if needed. Physical, Occupational and Speech therapists can all work with this agency to ensure you receive all the support needed to make sure your recovery is as successful as possible.

Outpatient therapy: If you are doing well enough to leave your home, you can receive therapies to help you regain muscle strength, gain skills to perform your daily activities or strengthen your speech and swallowing abilities. Outpatient therapies focus on developing a plan and teaching you methods for regaining strength and independence.

Private Duty Aids: These are people trained to help you with things that you need to do everyday, like bathing, dressing, eating, cleaning or preparing meals and medications. If you receive Home Health Care services this may be part of the support you receive, but if you do not qualify for Home Health Care, aids are available to hire. Insurance usually does not cover this service, but prices can be obtained from agencies.

Inpatient rehabilitation: If you are doing well enough to leave the hospital, but are not quite well enough to go home you may need to go to an inpatient rehabilitation. This is an institution with 24-hour nursing care as well as any therapies needed to help you regain your strength. Insurance generally covers this with some qualifications being required

For some people, going back to their home after surgery is not possible, even with these supports in place. If you are not able to safely return home there are a variety of living situations available with various levels of support available for short term or long term support.

Senior living apartments: These are special housing units for people who are above a certain age and mostly independent but needing a bit of help with some tasks like shopping, transportation or housekeeping. These facilities have individual apartments and different services available, sometimes for a fee. This is not covered by traditional health insurance. You pay rent to the facility along with any required fees for services you need.

Assisted living facility: These can be composed of apartments or individual bedrooms or suites with common living areas. These facilities offer help with things like bathing, housekeeping, meal preparation and medication management. These facilities have nurses on staff to oversee your care. These are not covered by traditional health insurance but may be covered under a long-term care policy.

Extended care facility (Nursing home): this is an option if you will need around the clock care for your daily needs. This can be partially covered by Medicaid but there are many requirements that must be met before coverage begins. Medicare and private insurances do not cover this, but long term care insurance may. This is a long-term housing option if you are unable to regain the strength or skills needed to live in other housing options.

People with frailty have a higher risk of having a prolonged recovery, needing to stay in some kind of facility before going home, or even being unable to return to your prior living arrangement. It is important to review your options and talk with your support team and healthcare team about your wishes before surgery so that all your options can be discussed before you are being discharged from the hospital.

