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Surgery During COVID-19: What are Hospitals Doing to Manage My Safety?

If you're preparing to reschedule your elective surgery, you may wonder what precautions hospitals and surgery centres are taking in light of the COVID-19 virus. Here are five things many medical centres are doing to help.

Watching the world as we know it hit pause due to a global pandemic is enough to make anyone feel uncertain. But waiting for months to undergo a joint replacement surgery only to have your procedure postponed due to COVID-19 can make even the most patient person upset.

If you have a painful hip, knee, shoulder, or other joint, then you know how frustrating it is to live with daily discomfort and a loss of mobility. A joint replacement has the potential to change your life, especially if you've already exhausted conservative options like physical therapy and medication. If this sounds like you, then your elective surgery isn't "optional." It's medically necessary to help you alleviate and manage your condition. For this reason, it's completely normal to be eager to get your surgery rescheduled.

On the other hand, it's also normal to feel worried about getting your procedure done during these unusual times. Will going to the hospital right now expose you or a loved one to increased risk? How will your surgical team manage your safety during a pandemic? We did some research to find out what different facilities around the country are doing to help people stay safe while receiving the medical interventions they need to improve their quality of life.

5 Ways medical facilities are keeping surgical patients safe in the wake of COVID-19

When the pandemic hit, many elective surgeries were cancelled **across of Europe**. This precautionary step was taken to preserve medical supplies, bed availability, and personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline workers treating patients with COVID-19. The temporary suspension was also intended to promote social distancing, slow the spread of COVID-19, reduce unnecessary risk for patients and staff, and prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed.

Many of these precautionary measures appear to be working, and elective surgeries are starting up again in many **countries**. If this is true for your **country**, then the only way to know for sure what your facility will do to keep you safe during your upcoming joint replacement is to talk to your medical team. They'll be sure to fill you in on all the details of their protective measures and let you know what to expect. The measures taken will also likely depend on whether or not your surgery is performed in a hospital or a private facility.

Be aware that some protective measures may surprise you. For example, many medical facilities currently have strict visitor policies, with patients being allowed only one designated visitor or even NO visitors. Understandably, this can feel unnerving. But it may be helpful to consider that the momentary restriction is designed to keep your loved ones safe while also allowing you to have your joint fixed.

In addition to modifying visitor policies, here are at least 5 other things hospitals are implementing in an effort to facilitate elective surgery:^{1,4}

- 1** Testing surgical candidates for COVID-19 within days of their procedure, as well as routinely screening and/or testing employees
- 2** Enhancing the already strict cleaning and safety precautions within operating rooms and recovery rooms (for example, requiring all surgical team members to wear masks, even if the patient has tested negative for COVID-19)
- 3** Reducing the number of people permitted inside operating rooms
- 4** Implementing scoring systems to assign prioritization levels and schedule procedures at appropriate times²
- 5** Utilizing telemedicine and remote care services for pre-operative and post-operative follow up visits³

Being excited and nervous about a joint replacement is expected even when there isn't a pandemic going on. If you or a loved one are waiting for a total knee replacement, total hip replacement, or some other joint replacement surgery, ask your surgical facility what steps they are taking to help minimize the spread of COVID-19.

References

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3. Ten Ways Healthcare Systems Can Operate Effectively during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020, May). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ways-operate-effectively.html>
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