

“Ten Things Patients Should Know” Series

SAFETY IN OUTPATIENT (AMBULATORY) SURGERY CENTERS

1. **DECIDING ON SURGERY:** Why is the surgery needed? Are there any non-surgical options? Ask about short and long-term risks and benefits. What are the most common complications? What may happen if the patient does not have the procedure?
2. **CHOOSING A SURGEON:** Ask how many times the surgeon has done this exact procedure and check his or her credentials online. Is the surgeon board-certified in the specialty you need? What is the surgeon's infection and complication rate? Ask if you have any health conditions that make same-day surgery riskier and why the surgeon is comfortable using a surgery center instead of a hospital.
3. **CONSENT:** Obtain a copy of the consent form to read ahead of time. Ask if the surgeon will perform the entire surgery. If other doctors will assist, what is their level of training and experience? Will trainees or residents work unsupervised for any part of the surgery? Confirm that all procedures to be performed are listed on the consent form.
4. **WHERE TO HAVE YOUR SURGERY:** Is the surgery center accredited and does it have written safety policies in place? Be aware that accreditation is not a guarantee of safety and that licensing requirements vary by state. The center should track infection rates and be able to tell you the percentage of their patients who develop an infection after surgery.
5. **ANESTHESIA:** Will your anesthesia be handled by a board-certified anesthesiologist or a certified registered nurse anesthetist? Staff members performing sedation should have specialized training and certification in anesthesia. Ask that children be sedated by a provider with training in pediatric sedation.
6. **RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES:** How are life-threatening emergencies handled? Does the staff have specialized training in advanced life support for both adults and children? Does the staff practice resuscitation skills together as a team?
7. **HOSPITAL USED FOR EMERGENCIES:** Ask which hospital patients are transferred to for serious complications. Does the hospital have an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) staffed with doctors called Intensivists who are specially trained in critical care medicine?
8. **HAVE AN ADVOCATE:** An advocate should ask the surgeon afterwards if there were any complications, excessive bleeding or unplanned procedures performed.
9. **DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS:** Does the patient need to see the surgeon for follow-up? Do appointments need to be scheduled with the patient's primary care doctor or other providers? Who should be contacted if there is a complication? When can the patient resume her regular medications?
10. **COMPLICATIONS TO WATCH FOR:** Report fever, excessive pain, redness or swelling of the surgical site, difficulty breathing or any other unusual symptoms.