

Hysterectomy can be an overwhelming experience. The following tips will help you prepare for your surgery.

Find the right doctor:

- Most experts recommend women consult a gynecologic oncologist for the surgery.
- If a gynecologic oncologist is unavailable, please be sure that your surgeon is familiar with the surgical protocol for high-risk women, and that the pathologist who will process and review your slides is also familiar with the protocol for high-risk women.

Decisions to discuss with your doctor before surgery:

- Have you completed your family planning? Do you wish to pursue fertility options before removing your uterus?
- Will you remove just your uterus or your ovaries as well?
- If you remove your ovaries, are you a candidate for hormone replacement? If you are, what type will you choose?

Questions to ask your doctor:

- Will the procedure be laparoscopic or robotic (small incisions) or laparotomy (a large incision)? If a laparotomy, why?
- How will your uterus be removed? Will it be removed intact or in pieces? How will the pieces be contained?
- How long will the procedure take? Will you need to spend the night in the hospital?
- What is the expected recovery time?
- What types of restrictions will you have after surgery, including work, driving, lifting, exercise and sexual activity?
- Which medications should you take or avoid before the surgery? (Be sure that your doctor is aware of all medications, vitamins and herbal supplements you are currently taking, especially fish oil, curcumin (turmeric) and any products containing aspirin).
- Are you likely to experience menopause symptoms? How should you prepare for surgical menopause? Are there options to help alleviate menopausal symptoms if they arise?

Insurance:

- Make sure your insurance covers the type of surgery you are having. For example, some insurance covers removal of ovaries and fallopian tubes for women at high risk for ovarian cancer, but does not cover the cost of removing the uterus.
- For what deductibles and copays will you be responsible?

Prepare your family, especially small children:

- Schedule childcare during your recovery. You will be unable to lift, drive or carry children for a while after your surgery.
- Talk to your small children before surgery, giving as much information as you feel they need to be comforted. Make sure they understand that they need to be gentle with you while you heal.

Get yourself ready:

- Take care of yourself before surgery. Take walks, strength train, do yoga, practice deep breathing and eat a healthy diet.
- Make sure you have clothes that are suitable for your recovery. Many women find that yoga pants or pajamas are comfortable and easy to put on and remove.
- If you are also having your ovaries removed and you have not gone through natural menopause, you may experience common menopausal symptoms after surgery. These may include mood swings and vaginal dryness and irritation. Each woman's experience is different. Spend some time before your surgery exploring tips for managing possible symptoms, including handheld fans for sudden hot flashes, Chillows and cool packs. Cotton pajamas, an extra set of sheets and light clothing for layering will help you feel better prepared to handle night sweats.
- Consider speaking with a menopause expert. The North American Menopause Society (menopause.org) has expert information and links to help you find a menopause expert near you.



Take care of your emotional well-being:

- Decide if you want support and, if so, consider reaching out to a local [FORCE volunteer](#) in your area or signing up for [FORCE's Peer Navigation Program](#) to speak with someone who has had this surgery. You can also find support on our [message boards](#).
- If you experience pre-surgery anxiety, talk to your doctor about seeing a therapist, getting anti-anxiety medication or exploring holistic therapies.

Get your home ready:

- Stock up on at least three days of meals or easy-prepare foods. Get foods that are easy to prepare, such as broth/soup, juice, fruits, veggies, rice, crackers and yogurt. Avoid broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and other gassy choices.
- Clean your house and take care of household tasks ahead of time. Decide which things you must take care of before your surgery and which can wait until you recover.
- Set up a "recovery area" in your home. If you have a favorite spot in your family room, clear off an end table where you can keep the remote, phone, books or e-tablet, the heating pad and a drink (don't forget some bendy straws or a good water bottle).
- Stock your pantry, organizing it so that you will have easy access to necessities.
- You might want to buy:
 - Throat lozenges for post-surgery irritation
 - Stool softener
 - Anti-gas medications, such as Mylicon, Maalox, Gas-X or peppermint tea
 - Cup with built-in straw
 - Handheld fan

Line up help:

- Make a list of things that will require help during your recovery, and then pass it along to people in your life who you know will be reliable. This includes transporting your kids while you can't drive, walking the dogs, picking up groceries and anything else you need. Don't be afraid to ask for help cleaning the house or doing laundry. If you're tech savvy, create and share a Google spreadsheet or go to [Signupgenius.com](#) to make a shareable list.

Suggested items to bring to the hospital:

- Comfortable slip-on flat shoes
- Pants or skirt with elastic or drawstring waistband or garments recommended by your doctor
- Pillow for the car ride home (leave in the car to put between your stomach and the seat belt)
- Lip balm
- Your photo ID and health insurance card
- Advance directives (optional)

The day before your surgery:

- Follow your doctor's instructions about what foods and liquids you can and cannot have before surgery.
- Your doctor may have you drink a liquid that will help clear your intestines before surgery.
- If you have children, you will appreciate having assistance. It's too hard to take care of people when you are running to the bathroom all day!

After surgery:

- Most importantly, be kind to yourself. Physically, it's important to accept your temporary limitations while you are healing. You will not do anyone any favors—especially yourself—by pushing too hard, too soon. Emotionally, understand that this is a life-changing event, and allow yourself to be sad if you feel a loss. Acknowledging your feelings and connecting with other women can be a huge relief, and FORCE is here to help you through it.

Toll-free Helpline: 866-288-RISK (7475)

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