

Surgery

If you don't understand something about the surgery, ask your doctor to explain it in a different way. You can take family or someone you trust to your appointments.

What is surgery?

Surgery is also called an operation or a procedure. It's a common way to treat cancer. Not all cancers can be removed or made smaller with surgery.

Surgery can sound scary, but it's very safe. Doctors and nurses will be looking after you and trying to get you okay as soon as possible.

Why do I need surgery?

Your body cannot "fix" cancer by itself, so doctors may use surgery to:

- remove the cancer from the body
- make the cancer smaller
- stop pain caused by the cancer
- deal with the symptoms caused by the cancer (e.g. fixing a blocked bowel).

Sometimes, the doctor may use surgery to find out more about the cancer. Surgery may be used together with other cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy ("chemo"), radiation therapy (radiotherapy) or hormone therapy.

How do I have surgery?

There are different types of surgery for cancer. You might have:

- **Open surgery** – One or more cuts are made in the body to remove the cancer.
- **Keyhole surgery** – A few small cuts are made in the body. The doctor uses a tiny camera to help see inside the body to remove the cancer.

The type of surgery you have will depend on the size of the cancer, where it is in your body, and if it has spread in your body. Before the surgery, you may need to see some doctors and nurses (pre-admission clinic). You may have some tests like blood tests, x-rays or breathing tests. These tests may be done before you go into hospital, or on the same day as your surgery. You'll be asked to sign a consent form before having surgery. This is called informed consent. It means that you understand any risks there might be during and after surgery.

SURGERY

Surgery will be at a hospital. This may not be your local hospital because you may need a special team with the right skills to look after you.

How long will the surgery take?

Your doctor will tell you how long the surgery might take. Sometimes this can change during surgery. This will depend on your type of cancer and if the cancer has spread to more than one part in your body. Before the surgery, the doctor will give you medicine that stops pain and helps you to go to sleep.

After surgery

When you wake up

You may feel:

- a bit sleepy
- some pain and a bit sick. You will be given medicine to help you feel better.

You may have:

- a drip in your arm (to help give medicine and fluids)
- a tube to drain fluid away from the site
- a tube to help you wee (a catheter).

Before you go home

You may learn:

- how to do some special breathing or other exercises. The doctors or nurses will talk to you about this.

How long will I be in hospital?

You may need to stay in hospital for a few days or until you feel okay. When you leave the hospital, community nurses may visit you to make sure you're getting better. You may have a check-up at the hospital in 1 or 2 weeks.

More information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au
- Visit menzies.edu.au/cancer
- Your local Aboriginal Health Service

This information was adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. Cancer Council NSW has updated this fact sheet in consultation with cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

This fact sheet features design elements from Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol, which was designed by Marcus Lee. Marcus was born and raised in Darwin, Northern Territory, and is a descendant of the Karajarri people. The Cancer Council Australia respect symbol (below) was designed by Riki Salam as part of his *Journey of Hope* artwork. Riki was born and raised in Cairns, Queensland, on Yidindji land, and has connections to Muralag, Kala Lagaw Ya, Meriam Mer and Kuku Yalanji peoples on his father's side and the Ngai Tahu people of New Zealand on his mother's side.



Cancer Council acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.