

The Patient's Surgery Decision Checklist

12 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SIGN THE CONSENT FORM

Before any major surgery, you deserve clear answers. This checklist covers the questions most patients never ask — but should. Print it, take it to your appointment, and don't proceed until you're satisfied with every answer.

The Surgeon

- How many of this exact procedure do you perform per year?

Volume matters. Outcomes improve significantly with surgeon experience. For complex procedures, 50+ per year is a reasonable benchmark.

- What are your personal complication rates for this procedure?

Not the hospital's — theirs specifically. Published data exists for many procedures via NHS consultant outcomes.

- Are you the surgeon who will actually perform the operation?

In teaching hospitals, a trainee may perform under supervision. You have the right to know and to request your named consultant.

The Decision

- What happens if I don't have this surgery?

Understanding the natural course of your condition without intervention is essential context for decision-making.

- Are there non-surgical alternatives I should try first?

For many conditions, conservative management, physiotherapy, or medication may be appropriate first steps.

- Would you recommend I get a second opinion?

A good surgeon welcomes this. If they resist, that's information too.

The Recovery

- What is the realistic recovery timeline?

Not the best case — the average. How long before I can drive, work, exercise, live normally?

- What rehabilitation will I need and who arranges it?

Post-surgery physiotherapy and rehabilitation are often where outcomes are won or lost.

- What are the most common complications and how are they managed?

Every procedure has risks. You need to understand the specific risks, their likelihood, and the plan if they occur.

The Logistics

- How long will I be in hospital?

Plan for the realistic stay, not the optimistic one. Arrange support at home for after discharge.

- What follow-up care is included?

Know exactly what happens after surgery: follow-up appointments, imaging, physiotherapy, and who to call if something feels wrong.

- What does this cost — total, including all follow-up?

For private patients: get a fixed-price quote covering the procedure, anaesthetist, implants, hospital stay, and all follow-up.

Need help navigating a complex medical decision?

