

# Questions to Ask if Considering Heart Surgery



## *What to ask your cardiologist*

- What is coronary artery disease? How many heart vessels are blocked?
- What are my treatment options and what are the risks and benefits of each?
- Why are you recommending this treatment over the others?
- What lifestyle changes will I need to make and what community resources are available to help?
- If I decide *not* to have open-heart surgery, will you support my decision?
- Will I be given some time to put my affairs in order prior to the heart surgery?
- Should I complete an Advance Directive?
- Should I avoid caffeine and other stimulants for 48 hours prior to surgery?
- (If diabetic) How often should I be monitoring my blood sugar?
- If I opt to have surgery, will I need to take medication afterwards? If so, for how long?

## *What to ask your heart surgeon*

- What are the risks and complications associated with this surgery?
- What are my specific risks? How risky is my surgery?
- Did I have a heart attack? If so, how will this affect my surgery?
- How many other (men / women) have you operated on with my same condition and what were their outcomes?
- How many patients do you operate on each year? How many of your patients were women?
- Can my chest and leg scars be minimized or can vessels be taken from a less visible location?
- How long is my expected recovery? When will I be able to resume normal activities? Drive a car? Return to work? Have sex? Be independent in activities of daily living? *Make plans for help in the home for the first full two weeks following your discharge from the hospital. Ask for a social service referral to help assist your family with sharing duties.*
- What is your fee? Will you accept my insurance as payment in full?
- If I decide not to have blood products administered, does the hospital follow Bloodless Care Protocols?
- What accommodations are available for my family's stay on the hospital campus so that they can support me throughout the operation?
- When will you be available to answer some of my concerns about the operation?

**Write down your appointment time to speak with your surgeon or the cardiac team nurse:**

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

## *Tell your heart surgeon*

- If you want bloodless care;
- If you want your Advance Directives *postponed* during surgery. *This is the usual procedure. It will be reinstated after you are stable and transferred to intensive care;*
- If you have had a vein stripping operation. *The doctor will need to look elsewhere for vessels;*
- If you would like to hear reassurances during the operation that "all is going well";
- If you would like to employ holistic measures to help you relax, for example therapeutic massage, aroma therapy, reflexology, bio-feedback or music therapy.
- If you would like to play a relaxing CD during the surgery. *You may need to bring in your own headphones and CD player, but this may be well worth the trouble.*

## *Things to discuss with your anesthesiologist*

Report any history that could affect how you respond to anesthesia, for example...

- History of panic attacks;
- Experiencing chest pains not related to activity;
- Taking medication for anxiety;
- Excessive, binge or weekend drinking;
- Taking herbal supplements;
- If you or a family member (blood relative) has ever had a serious reaction to anesthesia;
- If you have a drug allergy or sensitivity or you are allergic to latex.

List drug allergies here: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note** Some insurers cover Dr. Dean Ornish's Heart Disease Reversal Program. Call your insurer to find out if this care option is available to you. Ask for a visit from your minister or from the hospital's pastoral care department to help organize a family prayer session for you. Ask if your church community has a prayer network that you could be a recipient of. Whenever considering surgery, it is always wise to get a second opinion. If you don't feel that surgery is right for you, listen to your heart. Trust your instincts. The decision to have surgery is yours alone.

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