

Questions to ask about surgery and surgically induced menopause



If you are considering surgery to treat or reduce your risk of a gynaecological cancer, you might go through menopause. Surgically induced menopause means going into menopause because of an operation. If you have both ovaries removed it will be an immediate, permanent menopause. Other operations, such as a hysterectomy with an ovary or fallopian tube removal have a small chance of permanent menopause soon afterwards, and an increased chance of early menopause.

It is important to firstly discuss and understand the surgery recommended for you and the potential implications with your healthcare team. This will help you prepare for what you might experience after (such as surgically induced menopause). To help discussions with your healthcare team, below are key questions you might ask about gynaecological surgery for cancer risk reduction and surgically induced menopause. You can adapt these questions for yourself based on your individual circumstances.

Surgery

Understanding your surgical options

- What exactly is the surgery you are recommending for me? Will you take out my uterus (womb), ovaries, fallopian tubes or cervix? If I'm having a hysterectomy, what kind of hysterectomy is it?
- What are the pros and cons of each of my options?
- Why is this surgery recommended for me? Is it because of my health condition or because I have a high risk of cancer (for example, due to an inherited gene mutation)?
- What is the more recent evidence for this approach?
- If having surgery for cancer risk reduction, what will my residual cancer risk be after this surgery?
- What are the benefits of the surgery for me?
- What are the potential risks? How likely are they?
- How would you expect the surgery to affect my overall health and quality of life?
- What are the alternatives to surgery?
- What happens if I don't do anything?
- Are there any studies or trials I could be part of that contribute to research in this area?

Ovary removal and/or hysterectomy for cancer risk reduction

- What is the best gynaecological cancer risk management option for someone with my gene mutation or significant family history of cancer?
- What are the risks and benefits of removing only ovaries and fallopian tubes for risk cancer reduction? Could I remove only one ovary and my fallopian tubes?
- What are the risks and benefits of removing my fallopian tubes now and delay removing my ovaries?



- What are the risks and benefits of having a hysterectomy in addition to removing my fallopian tubes and ovaries?
- Will you check the tissue you remove for cancer cells or other abnormalities?
- What is the evidence and current best practice for the option that is best for my situation?
- What age is it recommended for me to have this surgery?
- Are there any studies or trials I could be part of that contribute to research in this area?

Fertility and menopause as a result of this surgery

- Will this surgery cause me to go into menopause or have an earlier menopause? (Be sure to mention if you will also be having treatment such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy or hormone therapy).
- If I am currently taking Menopausal Hormone Therapy (MHT), will I need to stop taking it before treatment and will I be able to return to using it after?
- How likely is temporary compared to permanent menopause in my situation?
- Is there anything we can do to increase my chance of avoiding an earlier menopause?
- What fertility preservation options are available to me before surgery and can you refer me to a specialist? For example, egg freezing, embryo freezing or ovarian tissue freezing.
- What are my options if I want to have children or more children in the future?

Preparing for surgery and recovery

- When do you recommend, I have this surgery?
- Is there anything I can do in that time to improve my chances of a better recovery? For example, with diet, exercise, psychology/counselling or anything else?
- Should/could I see a menopause specialist to talk through my options prior to surgery and can you refer me to a menopause specialist?

Care after the surgery

- What is the expected recovery time?
- Is it likely that I'll experience pain post-surgery and if so, what pain management strategies would be recommended?
- Are there any precautions I should take as I recover? Will you give me written instructions to follow about things like wound care?
- What are the signs of post-operative complications I should watch for?
- When can I expect to be released from hospital?
- When can I get back to regular activities, including work, sex and exercise? Will I have any restrictions on lifting, driving or other activities?



Surgically induced menopause

Managing menopausal symptoms

- How is a surgically induced menopause different to a natural menopause? Can it be more severe or sudden?
- How will I know if my menopause is temporary or permanent?
- What are the potential symptoms of surgical menopause?
- What are my options for managing menopausal symptoms?
- What are the risks and benefits of menopausal hormone therapy (MHT), and what kind could be suitable for me? For example, are patches or gels better than pills? Is vaginal oestrogen OK for me?
- Are these medications readily available and what are the potential costs?
- What are my options if MHT is not suitable for me?
- What are the chances my condition might come back if I use MHT? For example, my kind of cancer or endometriosis or fibroids?
- What non-hormonal treatments are there to manage menopause?
- What proven lifestyle approaches are there to manage menopausal symptoms? Are there other allied health professionals who I should see to help me manage my menopause, such as a dietitian or exercise physiologist?
- How can I best support my mental health and relationships during this change?
- If I can take MHT, should I have it planned and ready for when I leave hospital after my surgery?
- What will the impact be on my sexual and vaginal health?
- Are there any treatments that can reduce the risk of problems for me?
- Is there anything I can do to support this?
- Could menopause symptoms affect my ability in the workplace? For example, will it affect my cognitive ability such as memory?

Protecting your long-term health after surgical menopause

- What impact will surgical menopause have on my long-term health (both physical and mental wellbeing)? And is there anything I can do to reduce those risks before or after surgery?
- What can we do to protect my bones, heart and brain health?

Follow-up care for surgical menopause

- Will I need follow-up appointments, and how often? How often would you want to see me after surgery?
- How would we work together to manage my follow-up care? Would you manage all aspects of that care, or would you prefer that I see another doctor as well? How would the two of you communicate?
- What should I do if I have problems or questions in between visits? Who in your practice will be able to answer my questions?
- If I feel that I need to consult with additional medical specialists, will you be able to provide me with referrals?
- How soon would I be able to go back to GP care?



Emotional support for treatment-induced menopause

- I have fears about the surgery – are you able to help me work them through? (You will need to think about what these are and be able to share them with your medical team. For example, are you worried about surgery not solving your health issue, or about the impact of menopause on your general wellbeing or relationships?).
- How can I manage the emotional and psychological aspects of these procedures, including potential feelings of loss around fertility, fears about your condition coming back, or changes in body image?
- Are there support groups or counselling services available to help me cope with the emotional aspects of the surgery?

Costs

- What is the total cost of the surgery and the menopause treatment (if applicable) afterwards?
- Are there any out-of-pocket expenses I should be aware of? For example, anaesthetist fees, hospital excess.
- What are the costs of any follow-up appointments and treatments?
- Will I need to consider a budget for medical tests to monitor my health such as DEXA scans?
- Will I need to pay for any medications after the surgery?

Your healthcare team

- How many of these procedures have you performed – especially for women in my specific situation?
- What is your success rate with this type of surgery?
- Are you a specialist in gynaecological surgery?
- How experienced are you in managing surgically induced menopause?
- What is your experience with fertility preservation?
- What are your qualifications and certifications?
- Are you a fellow of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)?

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