

SURGERY PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Trying to wrap your mind around the overwhelming process of surgery preparation? Feeling scattered and wondering where to start? Wonder no more. This checklist will help you feel more confident and relaxed in the weeks before surgery. The examples provided under certain items are for illustrative purposes and aren't exhaustive. They're to help you brainstorm your own individual needs.

Depending upon your injury and surgery date, you may have a few months or a few days to plan for surgery. Regardless of how much time you have to prepare, my hope is that this list will help you get organized.

I've also included items for people traveling for surgery.

Consider the thoughts in this list in addition to information your doctor and physical therapist provide. Follow all post-op instructions from your doctor as well as discharge instructions from the hospital or surgery center. If you have *any* questions or concerns post-op, call your doctor, PA, or nurses, or speak to your physical therapist—better safe than sorry.

1-2 MONTHS OUT	
<p>⚙️ Fill the freezer - Make it fun! Invite friends and family over for a cooking party. Try some new recipes. Keep in mind food that you'll eat even with a dodgy stomach and post-operative nutritional demands. See dougkelsey.com/how-much-protein-is-enough for more information on nutritional needs during recovery.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Keep a list of all your friends (and their email addresses) who say, "Let me know how I can help." Spreading your needs among many friends keeps you from over-burdening one person.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Designate a friend to set up a CareCalendar (carecalendar.org) for you. Include meals, rides, and other things you'll need help with. Provide your friend with the list from #2, and have him or her wait until after surgery to send out the CareCalendar signup link to your friends. You'll have a better idea of your impending restrictions after surgery. Ideas for care calendar items: meals, rides for you, rides for your children, pet care, light cleaning.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Verify and understand your insurance benefits, including physical therapy visit limits.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Find a housekeeper and create a cleaning schedule. Do the same for lawn care, snow shoveling, etc.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Start saving small yogurt containers or plastic water bottles or other containers you can use to make ice blocks if you'll be using an ice machine post-op.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>⚙️ Reduce commitments to free up time for surgery preparation and recovery.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

1-2 MONTHS OUT

<p>⚙️ If you'll be attempting a new, unfamiliar sport to maintain fitness post-op, practice and perhaps take some lessons to learn the new movement patterns.</p>	
<p>⚙️ It's time for some dog training. If your dog is accustomed to your active lifestyle, she'll get bored while you recover. Don't let your house turn into what looks like a missile testing site. Hire a behaviorist or a good pet sitter to help alleviate your best friend's frustration.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Train your dog to be comfortable around crutches if you'll be using them. 2) Train your dog to not jump on you or anyone else. 	
<p>⚙️ Forecast your post-surgery limitations and brainstorm modifications to your home to be recovery-friendly. Move important items to lower shelves if you have a shoulder injury. Set up a ground floor bedroom if you have a leg injury, etc. Keep in mind how close the bathroom is to where you'll be resting. Do whatever you can to limit trips up and down stairs.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Notify your boss of your surgery and arrange for as much time off as you can manage—allow for adequate recovery even if there are bumps in the road. If possible, arrange a contingency plan in case your recovery is slower than expected. I highly recommend establishing a teleworking arrangement to allow yourself adequate recovery time.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling, purchase your plane ticket about 6 weeks before surgery (usually when tickets are least expensive). I have traveled many times on Southwest, and they are very kind and accommodating to injured people. For example, you will be able to board first and sit in a bulkhead seat with extra legroom. Also, the flight attendants will be more than happy to fill your ice bag.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling, make hotel or home rental reservations. I recommend staying in a vrbo.com or airbnb.com place if you'll have a caretaker with you. You'll appreciate the amenities and space a house provides rather than feeling cramped in a hotel room. Also, often a VRBO or Airbnb home is less expensive than a hotel.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling, make rental car reservations. If you're a member of Costco, they offer discounts at the major companies. Do not get a compact or other small car. After surgery you'll appreciate the comfort of a full-size vehicle.</p>	

3 WEEKS OUT

<p>⚙️ If you're a hip patient, a toilet seat riser will become your friend. Most drug stores carry them.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you already have crutches, make sure they're competent. Check pads for dry rot and tighten screws. If you live in snowy climates, install crutch crampons.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you'll require crutches and don't have any, get some. Your insurance company may cover them, so call before you pay. I highly recommend Mobilegs. They're much more comfy than standard crutches.</p>	
<p>⚙️ You can bring your crutches on the plane. Do not check them; they'll get beat to pieces.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're having lower body surgery, borrow or buy a bar stool so you can still do things (cook, dishes, etc.) in the kitchen without standing.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you will need a CPM machine (I like to call it the Constant Party Machine), ask your surgeon how long you'll need it and check your insurance coverage. You'll get your CPM immediately after surgery, and will probably need it for several weeks. Check with your surgeon's office to make arrangements for transporting your CPM home on the plane with you (in a protective box). I've traveled home many times with a CPM (and had clients traveling solo do the same), and it's not as difficult as you may think. When you return your rental car, ask to be driven to the terminal, then check in curbside after kindly asking someone to carry the box to the skycap desk. When you land, kindly ask someone to carry the box to where you'll meet your ride. People will be more than willing to help you!</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling for surgery, check with your hotel about shuttle availability to transport you to and from PT if you'll be without a caretaker. Also, look into ride sharing apps.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling for surgery, schedule a pre-op appointment with both your surgeon and physical therapist. Bring a list of questions and/or concerns and discuss answers to help relieve pre-op anxiety.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you're traveling for surgery, check on the availability of food delivery services/apps. Note: Food delivery (like Uber Eats or something similar) will also be very helpful to your family once you return home, as will grocery delivery services and good ol' Amazon.</p>	

3 WEEKS OUT

<p>Ask your doctor if you'll need pre-op prescriptions. For example, many patients with my condition—</p> <p>⚙️ arthrofibrosis—take Losartan for several weeks before and after surgery. If you'll require pre-op prescriptions, fill them now. Also, ask your pharmacist about drug interactions with existing prescriptions.</p>	
<p>Enlist your child(ren). Help them understand your impending surgery and teach them age-appropriate household tasks. Set up a reward system so they'll gladly help.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Get a laptop stand that will enable you to lie down and still use your computer. Visit Amazon and search: adjustable laptop stand</p>	

2 WEEKS OUT

<p>⚙️ Stock up on non-perishables—paper towels, TP, laundry detergent.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Fill prescriptions unrelated to surgery.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Stock up on over-the-counter meds you might need—Tylenol, ibuprofen, cold and allergy meds.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Stock up on pet food.</p>	
<p>⚙️ What's a surgery check list without a mention of poop?—or lack thereof. Stool softener is a must as is this tea: traditionalmedicinals.com/products/smooth-move. You may need Metamucil and/or Miralax too.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Earplugs and eye covers may help you rest better.</p>	
<p>⚙️ While you may have an ice machine, ice packs also come in handy. Stash a few of them in the freezer. corflex.com makes some well-designed ice packs.</p>	
<p>⚙️ If you are traveling and staying in a hotel, request a refrigerator in your room to store snacks. Also, request a room close to an ice machine if you'll be alone.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Get a couple of Ace bandages to secure ice against your injury.</p>	
<p>⚙️ Get an extra pair or two of TED hose.</p>	

2 WEEKS OUT

⚙️ Dedicate some pillowcases to providing a barrier between ice and your skin to reduce the risk of frostbite.

⚙️ If you're traveling for surgery, get a stash of small bills for tips for people like the skycap and wheelchair assistant.

1 WEEK OUT

⚙️ If you'll require one, bring your handicapped pass paperwork to your pre-op appointment. Plan to leave the appointment with signed paperwork. Try to get your handicapped pass before surgery.

⚙️ Stock up on movies and books (save money by going to the library).

⚙️ Pay bills

⚙️ Make two post-op phone number lists: 1) people you want your caretaker to call, and 2) people you want your caretaker to text. Number 2 is important because you'll be better served by sleeping after surgery rather than texting on drugs.

⚙️ Send your designated CareCalendar friend your list of names and email addresses along with your needs. Be specific about days, times, dietary preferences, etc.

⚙️ Purchase surgical scrub (Hibiclens) and use as directed—very important as an infection-control measure.

⚙️ Lay out a duffle bag to take to the hospital so you can throw things in it as you think of them.

⚙️ It's laundry time! Finish all of your family's laundry.

⚙️ If you'll need ice for an ice machine, start stocking up in your freezer. Here's where your old yogurt containers and plastic water bottles come in handy.

⚙️ Gather pillows of all shapes and sizes to prop up yourself or your surgical limb. Keep in mind that what's comfy after surgery can change from hour to hour. Pile the pillows up where you'll be resting and sleeping.

⚙️ If you're prone to post-op nausea, I've found this tea (elanaspantry.com/iced-ginger-chai) really helps. Warm or cold, it's equally stomach-settling. Rooibos and decaf loose-leaf tea will help you avoid caffeine if you wish.

1 WEEK OUT

<p>☀ Clean house or have your housekeeper come over.</p>	
<p>☀ Grocery shop for your home, and, if you are traveling, make a list of items you'll need upon your arrival at your surgery destination.</p>	
<p>☀ Email your friends (#2 in the "1-2 months out" section) giving them a heads up that you appreciate their offer to help and they can expect to receive a CareCalendar email.</p>	
<p>☀ If you'll require crutches, ask your PT or another appropriate professional to fit you and teach you how to use them. Practice crutching on a flat surface and up and down stairs. It's a whole lot easier to learn how to crutch when you're not in a drug-induced haze.</p>	
<p>☀ If you're traveling for surgery, write down a daily schedule and important notes (like emergency contacts) for your kid's, household's, and/or pet's caretaker/s. Send those notes to the appropriate people and print a copy to leave in your house.</p>	

NIGHT BEFORE

<p>☀ You will probably get a call from your anesthesiologist the night before surgery. If you've had issues with post-op nausea in the past, be sure to discuss preventative measures to keep you as nausea-free as possible.</p>	
<p>☀ Choose the vehicle that's most comfortable to get in and out of to take to the hospital.</p>	
<p>☀ Bring a packed bag to the hospital even if you are scheduled for day surgery—you just never know.</p>	
<p>☀ Take off all watches and jewelry—leave them at home.</p>	
<p>☀ Place extra blankets, towels, and the pillows you've gathered near your bed or recliner.</p>	
<p>☀ Clear a path from your bed to the bathroom.</p>	
<p>☀ Clean up all dog and kid toys, and other tripping hazards.</p>	
<p>☀ Give your caretaker the name and address of the pharmacy nearest to where you'll be having surgery, your prescription coverage information, and money to pay for post-op prescriptions.</p>	

NIGHT BEFORE

<p>☀ If you need a “no eating or drinking after ‘x’ time” note to remind you, make one and hang it on the bathroom mirror or fridge.</p>	
<p>☀ Put things by your bedside you’ll need within reach post-op. If you don’t have a bedside table, use a chair.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water bottle • Books • Pen/paper • Lip balm and lotion • Soothing throat drops • Tissues • TV remote and other remotes • Power cords • Snacks, since some meds need to be taken with food 	

THINGS TO PACK

<p>☀ In case your surgery is delayed, pack a comforting book or something to entertain you.</p>	
<p>☀ Unless you think hospital food is gourmet, bring something you’ll eat with a dodgy stomach.</p>	
<p>☀ Any teas or drinks you like</p>	
<p>☀ Toothbrush and toothpaste</p>	
<p>☀ Soothing throat drops—being intubated can cause a sore throat for a few days</p>	
<p>☀ Contact lens case and solution—wear your glasses to the hospital</p>	
<p>☀ Cream for your face and/or body and lip balm. One can hang meat in a frigid zero humidity operating room. While the climate will keep your OR crew from sweating during surgery, it’ll annihilate your skin and lips.</p>	
<p>☀ A change of clothes in case you’re allowed to change out of your fashionable hospital gown soon after you awake</p>	
<p>☀ Shorts for PT</p>	
<p>☀ Underwear. You’d be surprised how many stories my PT friends have told me about folks who forget underwear. Don’t become fodder for PT clinic jokes.</p>	

THINGS TO PACK

⚙️ Crutches if you aren't getting them from the hospital	
⚙️ Phone charger	
⚙️ Copy of the list of names and phone numbers you made in the "1 week out" section for your caretaker.	
⚙️ Pen and a notepad for your caretaker to take notes during the post-op debrief from your surgeon. This paper can also contain questions you want your caretaker to ask the surgeon.	
⚙️ Socks. Leave the germey, gross, ill-fitting hospital socks behind when you're discharged.	
⚙️ A few bars or other easy to digest snacks that have some nutritional value...Anything with ginger will help settle your stomach.	

POST-OP

⚙️ Keep a list of <i>everyone</i> who helps you (nurses, friends, family, therapists, drivers) and write thank you notes. You should already have stationery on hand. Remember: what you focus on grows, so, as much as you can, focus on what you're grateful for.	
⚙️ Keep a list of things you need help with. When someone offers help, refer to your list.	
⚙️ Make a post-op follow-up appointment with your surgeon.	

I hope you feel more prepared and informed. For additional tips and tools, sign up for my free newsletter at injuredathletestoolbox.com

I help athletes overcome the mental fallout of injury and stop the emotional roller coaster.

Please contact me (Heidi@InjuredAthletesToolbox.com) if you feel stuck and frustrated.

I wish you all the best and keep getting better. Forward...

Heidi Armstrong, Injury Recovery Coach and founder of Injured Athlete's Toolbox

