

Ten Frequently-Asked Questions about Surgery

1. How soon after surgery may I return to work/school?

In most cases that do not require general anesthesia (being put to sleep), you will feel well enough to return to light activity within 1-3 days after surgery, but not always. Some people find their vision is blurry from tearing and the use of ointments for several days after surgery. If you have had general anesthesia, your return to normal activity may be longer-- on the order of 5-7 days. Due to bruising and swelling, many patients prefer not to go out in public for several days (see #8 below).

2. I'm very active. What about exercise and contact lenses?

Most patients should avoid heavy lifting, bending over and strenuous aerobic exercise for one week after their procedure to avoid excessive bleeding or prolonged bruising and swelling. This does not mean you should be at bed rest. Feel free to walk the dog, go up and down the stairs of your home or drive the kids to school.

If you use contact lenses, you may not be able to wear them for 7-10 days after surgery. Plan on using or obtaining prescription glasses as back up during your recovery.

3. What kind of anesthesia will I have?

Many eyelid procedures may be safely and comfortably performed in the office. In this setting you will receive a numbing injection to the skin of the eyelid so that you should not feel any pain during the procedure. The shot is uncomfortable as all injections are but it doesn't last long. Some patients will opt for a pre-op valium or similar medicine to decrease any anxiety they may have. You may wear your street clothes and will be free to leave the office after your procedure with someone to drive you home..

Some eyelid and tear duct operations are performed in the hospital under “twilight” anesthesia in which an anesthesiologist administers sedatives and painkillers through an intravenous line while you are breathing on your own (similar to the type of anesthesia given for colonoscopies). Most orbit (eye socket) surgeries or surgery to remove a diseased eye are done under general anesthesia where a machine breathes for you. You will be required to get a physical by your regular doctor before you can have “twilight” or general anesthesia.

Not all procedures should be performed in the office setting. If you are eligible for office-based surgery and need help deciding whether to do it there or in the hospital, let us know and we can help you make the decision best for you.

4. How soon after surgery may I drive?

Even though office procedures entail no IV sedation, in most cases you will be advised to arrange for someone else to drive you home because surgery around the eye may cause temporary tearing, discomfort and swelling that may make driving unsafe.

If you have received “twilight” or general anesthesia, you may not drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours. You will need someone to drive you home from the hospital. When you feel ready to drive depends a lot on how comfortable your eyes feel and how clear your vision is.

5. Will my eye(s) be bandaged shut after surgery?

In most cases, there will be no bandage covering the eye(s). In certain tear duct surgeries, there will be a bandage on the side of the nose for a few days, but you will be able to open your eye after nearly all surgeries. Since the eye is not bandaged, you may have to put up with seepage and oozing of blood from the wound for the first day or so. You should be provided with instruction on how to manage this. When an eye is removed, a snug bandage is often placed over the socket for several days.

6. *Will I be in a lot of pain after my surgery?*

Most people who have eyelid or tear duct surgery require only extra-strength or regular acetaminophen (Tylenol) once they get home from the hospital. Remarkably, most patients undergoing lid or tear duct surgery will not need any pain relief the day after their procedure. Many people who have had eye socket surgery will need narcotic strength medicine for comfort the first 24-48 hours after surgery. If necessary, Dr. Fountain will prescribe this for you.

7. *Will I need someone to stay with me after surgery?*

In most cases, you will be able to care for yourself after surgery. You will be provided with instructions on how to take care of your wounds. However, it is always helpful to have someone around to give you some assistance so you can relax once you get home. You may be instructed to use eye ointment or drops on your stitches and/or in your eye each day for one week. For eye socket cases you may also be prescribed a short course of antibiotics and/or steroids. You may shower and shampoo as you normally would but try to avoid getting any bandages wet.

8. *How long before I look like myself again? What about make-up?*

The face, including the eyelids, has a rich and abundant blood supply which aides in wound-healing and decreases the risk of infection. However this rich blood supply may result in DRAMATIC and DISFIGURING bruising and swelling for one to two weeks after surgery. People who have surgery on both eyes will have more bruising than those who have surgery on just one side. The second or third day after surgery is usually when you will look your worst and most patients generally look worse in the morning than later on in the day. Most people see a dramatic improvement over the first week. Much of the swelling and bruising is usually gone by two weeks. In rare cases, mild swelling and bruising can persist a month or more. It is common for surgery on the upper lids to cause bruising and swelling in the lower lids/cheeks or even neck due to gravity. Make-up should be avoided around the eyes for 1-2 weeks after surgery.

9. I take blood thinners. Do I need to stop before surgery?

You must alert Dr. Fountain or her staff if you take blood thinners. She will advise you individually how your medication should be managed based on the nature of your procedure, your general cardiovascular health and the recommendation of the doctor who has recommended the blood thinners in the first place.

10. When do I come back for my post-operative checks?

In most cases, you will be seen in clinic about one week after surgery. This visit is to check wound-healing, make sure there is no infection and to remove stitches if necessary. In most cases you will then be asked to return 4-6 weeks later for a final check. People undergoing very minor surgeries may not need any follow up at all though Dr. Fountain is always available for consult if needed.