

# Surgical Palliative Care: What You Should Know



Surgeons have worked for centuries to reduce their patients' suffering and improve their quality of life. Palliative care (sometimes also called "supportive care") is medical care **focused on relieving the symptoms and stress of serious illness**. How do surgical care and palliative care fit together, and is palliative care right for you?

## Who provides palliative care, and what can it do for me?

Both surgeons and palliative care specialists can provide palliative care for patients considering an operation or a procedure. Basic elements of palliative care in surgery include relief of the following:

- Pain
- Nausea
- Bowel obstructions
- Constipation
- Shortness of breath
- Low appetite
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue

Surgeons and palliative care specialists also provide palliative care in the form of discussions such as these:

- Guiding decisions about treatment options, including operations or procedures
- Preparing in advance for possible non-ideal scenarios

When available, the palliative care team can support your surgical team and work together to ensure your treatment is safe and well-planned for the best possible results.

Members of the palliative care team may include:

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Social workers
- Chaplains
- Other specialists

Palliative care teams provide an extra layer of support to patients and caregivers whose needs are more complex. Palliative care providers can contribute in the following ways:

- Further address pain, discomfort, and issues related to disease and its treatment
- Help patients and their caregivers better understand their illness and treatment options
- Set realistic goals of treatment and explore values and preferences when possibilities are limited
- Support communication and coordinate care between providers, patients, and caregivers to keep your treatment plan focused on achieving what matters most to you
- Provide out-patient and in-patient comprehensive medical care in line with a patient's goals

### **Can I have palliative care if I am having an operation or a procedure?**

Palliative care might be right for you if you have a serious illness, even if you are considering operative treatment or procedures. Examples of serious illness include:

- Cancer
- Vascular disease
- Heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Lung disease
- An emergency surgery condition

### **What is the right time for palliative care?**

Palliative care can be provided at any stage of your illness, including alongside surgical treatments aimed at curing or controlling your disease. It may be especially helpful if you need support with:

- Managing symptoms
- Making decisions about an operation or a procedure
- Planning and preparing for an operation or procedure and after-surgical care
- Managing problems that happen after operations or procedures
- Coping with other side effects of treatment

### **Who pays for palliative care?**

Most insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, cover palliative care.

### **How do I get palliative care?**

If you and your caregiver are feeling overwhelmed with the symptoms and stress of your illness, ask for help! Palliative care is often available in a range of settings. You may have an in-hospital consultation or an appointment in an office or online. Palliative care may even be available in your home. Just tell your surgeon and nurses that you would like to see the palliative care team.

### **Learn more about palliative care**

The American College of Surgeons Surgical Palliative Care website and the Center to Advance Palliative Care have resources for both patients and their health care teams.

➔ [facs.org/palliativecare](https://facs.org/palliativecare)

➔ [getpalliativecare.org](https://getpalliativecare.org)