

How do I join an elective surgery waitlist at a NSW public hospital?



This information is for people who need or are considering an elective surgery to improve their health. It covers some of the frequently asked questions NSW Health's Surgery Access Line receives about how to join a waitlist for elective surgery at a New South Wales (NSW) public hospital.

If you're already on an elective surgery waitlist, or have been given a date for your surgery, the following fact sheets might be useful.

- [I've been waitlisted for elective surgery – what happens next?](#)
- [I've been given a date for my elective surgery – what happens next?](#)

What's the difference between emergency and elective surgery?

There are two types of surgery available in NSW public hospitals.

Emergency surgery might be necessary after an accident or if there is a sudden or urgent change in your normal health, which is immediately life-threatening or will get worse if not treated quickly. Examples of emergency surgery include fixing a broken arm or removal of your appendix.

Elective surgery is planned, non-emergency surgery that is medically necessary to improve your health. Examples include cataract removal and knee or hip replacement surgery.

How do I join a waitlist for elective surgery?

The decision to have elective surgery needs to be made carefully. You, your general practitioner (GP) and a specialist surgeon must consider all available options and agree on what is best for your health. In the case of a knee or hip replacement, for example, that might include non-surgical options such as weight loss or physiotherapy.

Step 1: Visit your GP

To join a waitlist for elective surgery at a NSW public hospital you must first visit your GP to discuss your health care needs. If appropriate, your GP will give you a referral letter to visit a specialist surgeon.

Step 2: Make an appointment with a specialist surgeon

You will then need to make an appointment to see the specialist surgeon at either the outpatient clinic of a NSW public hospital, or at the surgeon's private consulting rooms. Out-of-pocket costs may apply to see a surgeon in their private consulting rooms.

Step 3: Meet with a specialist surgeon

When you meet with the specialist surgeon, you will discuss the available options to deal with your health issue.

If you both agree that surgery is the best option, the surgeon will complete a Recommendation for Admission (RFA) form and send it to the Admissions Office at the hospital.

There will also be paperwork for you to complete. **You must complete all necessary paperwork and return it to either the hospital or the surgeon as directed.**

You may want to bring a pen and paper to take notes at your appointment with the specialist surgeon.

You might also wish to bring a family member or friend to take notes and help you remember the information the surgeon shares with you.

Other items to bring include:

- a list of all medications you are currently taking
- results of any recent medical tests and scans (for example, x-rays or ultrasounds)
- a list of questions and treatment options you would like to explore with your surgeon.

Examples of questions to ask your specialist can be found on the [NSW Health website](#) and the [Choosing Wisely website](#).

Step 4: Patient confirmation letter

The team at the Admissions Office will review the RFA form and – if all the information is correct – will add your name to an elective surgery waitlist.

The hospital will send you a letter to confirm your place on the waitlist. It will contain additional information about your surgery, including an estimated wait time and who to contact if you have any questions. **Please keep this letter in a safe place.**

If you haven't received your letter within two weeks, please contact the Admissions Office at your referred hospital.

How long will I have to wait for my surgery?

There are many people who need surgery in public hospitals. To help manage elective surgery waitlists, hospitals use a category system.

Your surgeon will decide if it's safe for you to wait for your surgery based on the urgency of your health needs. Your confirmation letter from the hospital will state which category has been recommended for your surgery.

Category 1 – Urgent: your specialist has recommended that your condition usually requires surgery within 30 days.

Category 2 – Semi-urgent: your specialist has recommended that your condition usually requires surgery within 90 days.

Category 3 – Non-urgent: your specialist has recommended that your condition usually requires surgery within 365 days.

The hospital will make every attempt to treat you in the time frame recommended by your specialist. This may include allocating a suitable alternative surgeon to complete your surgery.

For more information

If you need more information on how to join a waitlist for elective surgery at a NSW public hospital, please call the NSW Health **Surgery Access Line on 1800 053 456** during business hours.

If you have questions about your current place on a surgery waitlist, please call the Admissions Office at your referred hospital.

[Contact your referred hospital – Healthdirect website](#)