Guide to Using the Improving Surgical Care and Recovery Patient Education Booklets

AHRQ Safety Program for Improving

Surgical Care and Recovery

Purpose of Booklets

The booklets were developed for patients and caregivers to engage and prepare them for surgery and recovery in the hospital and at home. Patients and caregivers need to know what they can do and what to avoid to have as safe a surgical and recovery experience as possible. The booklets are a resource for this information, and they highlight the important participatory role patients and caregivers have as they prepare for surgery and recovery. Each booklet was created by experienced content experts specifically for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Safety Program for Improving Surgical Care and Recovery (ISCR). ISCR is a collaborative program designed to enhance the perioperative care of surgical patients. The content of the booklets is based on the program’s evidence-based pathways for improving surgical care and recovery. The booklets are designed to provide general information. They are not a substitute for instructions or for surgery-specific education provided by healthcare team members.

Patient and Caregiver Testing

To ensure the booklets are easy to understand and address common questions and concerns, multiple iterations were reviewed by a variety of patients and caregivers of varying demographic and education levels. They found the information and illustrations were clear.

Reviewers appreciated the level of detail included in the booklets, particularly the tips and insights for preoperative preparation, such as a bowel prep if that was necessary for their surgery; pronunciation guides for medical terms; an explanation of what does and doesn’t qualify as a clear liquid; and explanations of why they shouldn’t shave before surgery. Keep in mind that while these booklets may seem lengthy, the pages are not dense with text and they have tables of contents, illustrations, checklists, and sufficient white space. Some reviewers said even if they did not read through it in one sitting, they still wanted all the information for reference.

How To Use the Booklets

To use a patient education booklet as part of your enhanced recovery initiative:

* Download it and fill in the designated areas on the last pages of the booklet with your hospital’s specific information.
* Review the booklet(s) for your service line(s) with your surgical teams and plan how the booklets will be distributed as well as who will conduct patient education.
* Only print from the digital file. Avoid making copies of printed material, as this may affect the color contrast and make it more difficult to read.

Proactively Address and Normalize the Discussion of Challenging Topics

Many people are embarrassed to ask important questions about pain medications, advance directives, and sex. The booklets introduce these topics and prompt people to ask candid questions. However, people are often still anxious or unsure how to broach these topics with their clinicians. Normalize these conversations by proactively bringing up these topics. One strategy is to mention these topics, and if people aren’t comfortable discussing them initially, encourage them to read through the booklet and then circle back to see if they have questions.

Help People Feel Safe Asking Questions

Patients and caregivers who had previous experience with surgery voiced concerns about some changes, like reducing fasting intervals and adding carbohydrate loading with juice or sports drinks before surgery. The booklets reassure people these changes are based on research and improve recovery. But patients and caregivers may still be silent about their concerns. Ask if they, their family members, or anyone they know had surgery before, and if they have questions or concerns about any of this evidence-based information.

Another area of concern is pain medication. Some people are afraid to take any opioids, while others worry they won’t get enough to control their pain. The booklets try to address both concerns, and to educate people about side effects such as constipation. Find out what each patient is concerned about regarding pain and medications. Reassure them that your team will personalize their pain management.

Help People Understand Why and How

When people understand why walking and moving can help them recover, or why they shouldn’t smoke or use other nicotine products in the weeks before surgery, the logic makes sense for them and they’re more likely to participate and follow instructions. The knowledge gained also helps people appropriately solve problem and ask better questions. For example, many patients and family reviewers for the colorectal surgery booklet had questions about the bowel prep and clear liquid diet. When they understood that these processes would help prevent infections, they wanted to make sure they knew how to tell if their colon was empty. The explanation that a clear liquid was something they could see through helped them understand why Gatorade, lemonade, and apple juice qualified as *clear* liquids, but many other types of juice drinks did not qualify as clear.

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AHRQ Pub. No. 23-0052

June 2023