

### Who can I contact if I have a question about elective surgery?

If you have any questions about your surgery, contact the Elective Surgery Access Coordinator at your hospital.

For more general information on how hospitals manage elective surgery visit:

[www.health.vic.gov.au/performance](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/performance)

or call the Department of Health on **1300 781 821**

### What do I need to know about my elective surgery?



To receive this document in an accessible format phone 1300 781 821.

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# What is elective surgery?

Elective surgery is surgery for which, in the opinion of the treating medical practitioner, admission can be delayed for at least 24 hours.

Timing of elective surgery is based on clinical need or urgency. Your surgeon will have assessed your clinical need and assigned an urgency category for your condition.

The Victorian system has three urgency categories. Each category has a desirable time for treatment.

## Category 1: Urgent cases

Treatment within 30 days is desirable for a condition that has the potential to deteriorate quickly to the point that it might become an emergency.

## Category 2: Semi-urgent cases

Treatment within 90 days is desirable for a condition that is causing pain, dysfunction or disability but which is not likely to deteriorate quickly or become an emergency.

## Category 3: Non-urgent cases

Treatment at some time in the future is acceptable for a condition causing minimal or no pain, dysfunction or disability that is very unlikely to deteriorate quickly and does not have the potential to become an emergency. Treatment within 12 months is used as a guide.

# How am I scheduled for elective surgery?

When you are assessed by a surgeon as requiring surgery, you will be placed on a hospital-based elective surgery list.

Elective surgery lists are not simple queues managed on a 'first come – first served' basis. Your surgeon or specialist will assess your condition according to the elective surgery categories and schedule you for surgery based on your medical needs.

The hospital will then contact you to arrange a mutually acceptable date for your surgery.

You have a responsibility to attend all appointments that have been arranged for you. Failing to attend for your scheduled surgery may impact the time it takes for the hospital to treat you.

# When will I be treated?

Treatment times for elective surgery can vary between hospitals and surgical specialties. You can ask your treating hospital or doctor about their treatment times.

A website has also been developed to provide more information about elective surgery and treatment times. The website includes a searchable database for patients and general practitioners (GPs) to find treatment times and procedures in Victoria's major public hospitals. This will help provide options for some elective surgery patients.

The website is at [www.health.vic.gov.au/performance](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/performance)

# What if I'm not ready for treatment?

Elective surgery patients are regularly reviewed to ensure they are ready and available to be admitted for surgery. As a patient you may not be ready for elective surgery for a number of reasons.

For example, you may require additional medical treatment before you can have your surgery, or you may choose to delay your surgery for work or other reasons, such as unavailability of carer support.

It is important to note that there are limits that apply to the length of time you can be unavailable for surgery for personal reasons and still remain on the hospital's list.

These are:

- 30 days for Category 1 patients
- 90 days for Category 2 patients
- 180 days for Category 3 patients

If you exceed the relevant limit the hospital will contact you to discuss your plan for surgery. If your circumstances change and you are once again available for surgery you should notify the hospital as soon as possible.

The hospital will inform you in writing of any changes in your care status and the reason for the change.

# What if my condition gets worse?

If you feel your condition has changed you should contact your GP or the hospital for advice.

# What happens if the hospital postpones my treatment?

Sometimes postponing elective surgery is unavoidable. This is because demand for emergency services is unpredictable and those patients who attend hospitals with life-threatening illnesses take priority over those requiring other surgery.

Your hospital will aim to minimise postponements and offer support and assistance while the surgery is being rescheduled. If your surgery is postponed, your hospital will contact you to arrange a new date for surgery in the near future.

# Does private health insurance affect my time until treatment?

Public hospitals treat both public and private patients and are required to treat patients according to clinical urgency. Private insurance or willingness to pay for your surgery will not reduce the time you wait for surgery in a public hospital. You may be asked to choose whether you would like to use your private insurance at a public hospital. Private insurance allows you to choose your doctor but there may be some costs involved. You should contact your hospital if you need further information about using your private insurance at a public hospital.

# Can I have my surgery done at another hospital?

Yes. You can ask your GP to refer you to a different hospital, which may reduce your waiting time. If you are already on a hospital's list awaiting surgery, you can talk to the hospital's Elective Surgery Access Coordinator about transferring.