

Oophorectomy can be an overwhelming experience, even when you have already experienced natural menopause. The following tips will help you prepare for this step on your journey.

## Preparing for surgery

### Find the right doctor:

- Most experts recommend women consult a gynecologic oncologist for the surgery.
- If a gynecologic oncologist is unavailable, please be sure that your surgeon is familiar with the surgical protocol for high-risk women, and that the pathologist who will be processing and reviewing your slides is also familiar with the protocol for high-risk women.

### Decisions to discuss with your doctor before surgery:

- Have you completed your family planning? Do you wish to pursue fertility options before removing your ovaries?
- Will you remove just your ovaries and fallopian tubes or your uterus and cervix as well.
- Are you a candidate for hormone replacement; if so, what type?

### Questions to ask your doctor:

- Will the procedure be laparoscopic or robotic (small incisions) or laparotomy (a large incision)? If a laparotomy, why?
- If you are having a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus): How will your uterus be removed? Will the cervix also be removed?
- How long will the procedure take? Will you need to spend the night in the hospital?
- What is the expected recovery time?
- What types of restrictions will you have after surgery, including work, driving, lifting, exercise and sexual activity?
- Which medications should you take or avoid before the surgery? Be sure that your doctor is aware of all medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements you are currently taking, especially fish oil, curcumin (turmeric) and any products containing aspirin.
- How do I prepare for surgical menopause? Are there options to help alleviate menopausal symptoms if I get them?

### Insurance:

- Make sure your insurance covers the type of surgery you are having. For example, some insurance covers removal of ovaries and fallopian tubes for women at high risk for ovarian cancer, but does not cover the cost of removing the uterus.
- For what deductibles and copays you will be responsible?

### Prepare your family, especially small children:

- Schedule childcare for children during your recovery. You will be unable to lift, drive, or carry children for a period of time after your surgery.
- Talk to your small children before surgery, giving as much information as you feel they need to be comforted. Make sure they understand that they need to be gentle with you while you heal.

### Get yourself ready:

- Take care of yourself before surgery. Take walks, strength train, do yoga, practice deep breathing, and eat a healthy diet.
- Make sure you have clothes that are suitable for your recovery. Many women find that yoga pants or pajamas are comfortable and easy to put on and remove.
- If your ovaries are removed before you go through natural menopause, you may experience common symptoms of menopause after surgery, including hot flashes, mood swings, as well as vaginal dryness and irritation. Keep in mind that each woman's experience is different; you may not experience all (or any) of these symptoms. Spend some time before your surgery exploring tips for managing possible symptoms, including hand-held fans for sudden hot flashes, Chillows, cool packs, cotton pajamas, and an extra set of sheets for night sweats—having light clothing for layering on hand will help you feel better prepared to handle night sweats.
- Consider speaking with a menopause expert. The North American Menopause Society ([menopause.org](http://menopause.org)) has expert information and links to help you find a menopause expert near you.



### Take care of your emotional well-being:

- Decide if you want to find a support group, and if so, consider joining a local [FORCE group](#) in your area (if you have one) or a hospital-based support group. If not, find support on our [message boards](#).
- If you experience pre-surgery anxiety, talk to your doctor about seeing a therapist, getting anti-anxiety medication, or exploring holistic therapies.

### Get your home ready:

- Prepare and freeze at least three days worth of meals or easy-prep foods. Consider broth/soup, juice, fruits, veggies, rice, crackers and yogurt. Avoid broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and other gassy choices.
- Clean your house and take care of household tasks ahead of time. Decide which things you must take care of before your surgery and which can wait until you recover.
- Set up a “recovery area” in your home. If you have a favorite spot in your family room, clear off an end table where you can keep the remote, your phone, books or e-tablet, the heating pad, and a drink (don’t forget some bendy straws or a good water bottle).
- Stock your pantry, organizing it so that you will have easy access to necessities.
- You might want to buy:
  - Throat lozenges for post-surgery irritation
  - Stool softener
  - Anti-gas medications, such as Mylicon, Maalox, Gas-X, or peppermint tea
  - Cup with built-in straw
  - Hand-held fan

### Line up help:

- Make a list of things that require help during your recovery, and then pass it along to people in your life who you know will be reliable. Don’t be afraid to ask for help cleaning the house or doing laundry. This includes transporting your kids while you can’t drive, walking the dogs, picking up groceries, and anything else you need. If you’re tech savvy, create and share a Google spreadsheet, or go to [Signupgenius.com](#) to make a shareable list.

### Suggested items to bring to the hospital:

- Comfortable slip-on flat shoes
- Pants or skirt with elastic or drawstring waistband, or garments recommended by your doctor
- Pillow for the car ride home (leave in the car to put between your stomach and the seat belt)
- Lip balm
- Your ID
- Advance directives (optional)

### The day before your surgery:

- Follow your doctor’s instructions about what foods and liquids you can and cannot have before surgery.
- Your doctor may have you drink a liquid that will help clear your intestines before surgery.
- If you have children, you will appreciate having assistance. It’s too hard to take care of people when you are running to the bathroom all day!

### After surgery

Most importantly, be kind to yourself. Physically, it’s important to accept your temporary limitations while you are healing. You will not do anyone any favors, especially yourself, by pushing too hard. Emotionally, understand that this is a life-changing event, and allow yourself to be sad if you feel a loss. Acknowledging your feelings and connecting with other women can be a huge relief, and FORCE is here to help you through it.

