

## **Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary**

**Title:** Routine testing prior to surgery: is it always necessary?

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### **Plain Language Summary:**

It seems to make sense that before undergoing surgery, patients should be routinely tested to make sure they are healthy enough for it. In the past doctors have routinely performed blood, heart, and lung tests to check for anything that might make surgery too dangerous for an individual patient. For example, you may have heard of a “complete blood count” or an “electrocardiogram,” which among other basic tests can help diagnose many medical problems. Today, many surgeries are minor enough to allow patients to receive their procedure and return home on the same day. These surgeries, known as “same-day”, “ambulatory”, or “outpatient” surgeries are common and very safe.

What's the harm in double checking to make sure you're healthy? The truth of the matter is that tests are only one part of the whole story. An abnormal result could indicate that you're sick, but it could also mean that you have a health problem that doesn't affect your surgery, or it might mean nothing at all. However, it can lead to further testing which can be unnecessary, expensive, uncomfortable, or even risky. These tests also may force you delay or cancel your surgery for no reason. On top of that, problems that people commonly have after procedures, such as nausea, pain, or infection, may not be preventable even with testing prior to surgery.

In many cases, a doctor can be a better judge of your health than any single test taken out of context. Before ordering tests right away, your doctor should ask you some questions about your medical history and perform a physical examination to help them form a good idea of your overall health. At this point, they may determine you are in good health and recommend that you proceed to surgery without unnecessary tests. On the other hand, they may find something that makes them concerned and advise that you have a more intensive evaluation before you are safe to undergo surgery.

It's important to remember that these guidelines don't apply to everyone. If you have a heart, lung, kidney, liver, or blood disease or if you are having other serious medical problem, you might be at higher risk of complications from your surgery. In these situations, your doctor may want to do some tests just in case, even if you look and feel healthy.

The most important thing is your safety. You should not hesitate to share any questions or concerns you have with your doctor, and together you can make sure your surgery a successful one.

### **Additional Resources:**

#### **Outpatient Surgery**

[http://www.emedicinehealth.com/outpatient\\_surgery/article\\_em.htm#Outpatient Surgery Introduction](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/outpatient_surgery/article_em.htm#Outpatient_Surgery_Introduction)

#### **Common Tests Performed Before Surgery**

<http://stanfordhospital.org/clinicsmedServices/COE/surgicalServices/generalSurgery/patientEducation/tests.html>

**Key Words:**

Preoperative

Routine

Testing

Ambulatory

Surgery

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