



THE SURGICAL SPECIALTIES

By Kristen Morgan

In the past family doctors were in charge of all health care. They treated colds. They delivered babies. They also performed operations. Operations are now done by surgeons. These doctors have received years of training to learn specialties such as neurologic surgery or orthopedic surgery. If you need to have surgery, it is important to know which type of specialist will be your doctor. Following is information about some of the surgical specialties.

General Surgeons

These doctors treat all parts of the body. All surgeons are trained in this area. Some of the areas general surgeons operate on are the

- breast,
- stomach, and
- glands.

Colon and Rectal Surgeons

These doctors treat problems of the colon. They also operate on the rectum and anus. Some of the operations colon and rectal surgeons perform are

- removal of the colon,
- removal of hemorrhoids, and
- removal of polyps in the colon.

Neurosurgeons

These doctors operate on the brain. They also treat the spinal cord and surrounding areas. Some of the areas neurosurgeons operate on are the

- skull,
- brain,
- spine, and
- nerves.

Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Obstetricians take care of women while they are pregnant. They also deliver babies, both vaginally and by cesarean section. Gynecologists take care of the reproductive health of women. Some of the surgeries they perform are

- removal of the uterus,
- removal of one or both ovaries, and
- tying the Fallopian tubes.

Doctors who work in both areas are called OB/GYNs. They do all of these procedures.

Ophthalmologists

These doctors operate on the eyes. Some of the operations ophthalmologists perform are

- removal of cataracts,
- repair of injury, and
- correction of vision.

Orthopedic Surgeons

These doctors operate on bones. They also treat problems with muscles. Some of the parts of the body orthopedic surgeons repair are

- bones,
- joints, and
- damaged nerves or tendons.

Otorhinolaryngologists

These doctors operate on the ear, nose, and throat. They are often referred to as ENT surgeons. Some of the operations ENT surgeons perform are

- placement of tubes in the ear for drainage,
- removal of tonsils,
- removal of nasal polyps, and
- removal of cancer of the throat or neck.

Pediatric Surgeons

These doctors treat children from infancy through the teenage years. This area of surgery is not limited to one part of the body. Some of the operations pediatric surgeons perform are

- removal of the appendix,
- removal of tonsils, and
- circumcision.

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons

These doctors treat physical flaws. Some of the operations plastic surgeons perform are

- breast reconstruction,
- face lifts,
- surgery of the nose,
- skin grafting, and
- removal of fat.

Podiatrists

These doctors operate on the feet. They also treat problems in the ankles. Some of the operations podiatrists perform are

- amputation of toes,
- removal of bunions, and
- reconstruction of the ankle.

Thoracic Surgeons

These doctors operate on the chest. They also operate on the lungs and vessels surrounding the heart. Some of the operations thoracic surgeons perform are

- opening of the chest cavity, and
- removal of all or part of the lung.

Urologists

These doctors operate on the urinary system. They also treat problems in genitals. Some of the operations urologists perform are

- examination of the bladder,
- surgery of the prostate,
- removal of stones in the kidney,
- removal of the kidney, and
- removal of the bladder.

These doctors also take care of sexual problems in males.

Cardiac and Vascular Surgeons

These doctors operate on the circulatory system. There are two kinds of vascular surgery.

Cardiovascular surgery focuses on the heart. Some of the operations cardiac surgeons perform are

- coronary bypass surgery,
- coronary angioplasty,
- repair of the heart valves.

Vascular surgery focuses on the blood vessels outside of the heart. Some of the surgeries vascular surgeons perform are

- aneurysm repair,
- repair of blood vessels, and
- bypass surgery.

Tips for Choosing a Surgeon

You need surgery. You want the best. But, how do you choose? Here are some tips for picking a skilled doctor.

Ask health professionals whom they would recommend. Also ask family members. Ask friends. Talk to others who have gone through this type of surgery. What do they recommend?

Talk to several doctors. Ask them the following questions:

- How often do you operate? (Experienced surgeons usually operate at least two or three times a week.)
- How often have you done the operation I am going to have?

Choose doctors who are “board certified.” This means they have met high standards in their areas of specialty. To find out if a surgeon is certified, contact the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) at (800) 776-2378, or www.certifieddoctor.org. Or, check your local library for a copy of the Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists.

Look for the letters “FACS” after doctors’ names. FACS stands for Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. Fellows have met high standards of care.

Make sure that the doctor can operate in a hospital with a good record. Check for

- inpatient hospitals that have met the standards of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and
- outpatient hospitals certified by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.

Look for “red flags” such as patient complaints about a doctor. To find out about complaints, call your state medical licensing board. Be sure to contact your insurance company. It is important to find out if a doctor is on your health plan.

Resources

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National Health Information Center. Available from <http://www.health.gov/nhic>