

How to select a spine surgeon

When it comes to back and neck pain, it's important to know what to look for in a spine surgeon and spine surgery center.



Use this checklist to ensure you are asking questions to help you make the best decision:

Is the spine surgeon you're considering board certified?

Board certification requires time and experience; it's not something that can be applied for immediately after completing medical education. Board certification in neurosurgery entails rigorous training and 7 years of neurosurgical residency. In short, board certification demonstrates a neurosurgeon's expertise in neurological surgery and clinical knowledge. If a surgeon has not practiced long enough for board certification, that does not mean they are not highly qualified. Check with them about why they are not board certified and use the other questions on this sheet to help you assess their qualifications.

How much experience does the spine surgeon have in the surgery you are considering?

You might love being an early adopter of the latest iPhone or app, but when it comes to your spine, you do not want to be the first patient a surgeon operates on. Spine surgeons gain skills and efficiencies through repetition of spine surgery. Board certification is one indication that a spine surgeon has extensive experience. You should also ask questions about your spine surgeon's experience with the surgery you are considering: how many procedures have they done, what's their infection rate, what are patient outcomes?

What type of spine surgery team does your spine surgeon/spine surgery center offer?

Successful spine surgery requires a team approach with experts in every area of back and neck pain care, from initial diagnosis to pain management to surgery and post-surgical care. Take note of how the team answers your questions, schedules appointments, and manages your care. While the spine surgeon's expertise is important for your spine surgery, their team of physicians, psychiatrists, and spine specialists are critical for your overall experience.

Does the spine surgery center you are considering offer a range of surgeries?

When it comes to spine surgery, you want to have as many options as possible so that you can choose the best surgery for your needs. Some spine centers only specialize in one or two procedures, which can pigeonhole you into a solution that may not meet your needs.

Will your spine surgery happen at a hospital or surgery center? And does your spine surgeon have experience with both as well as inpatient and outpatient procedures?

It's important that you have choices in where you receive your surgery and that, if inpatient care is needed, you have that option. Also, what will your care team look like if you are an inpatient? Will the same physician assistant who was part of your initial consultation be part of your inpatient team? When looking for a spine surgeon, you should consider how their team will offer support and consistent care regardless of whether or not you're an inpatient.

What types of pre and post spine surgery education do they offer?

You want to go into spine surgery prepared and to ensure the best possible outcomes. What does your spine surgery center offer in terms of preparation before spine surgery? You also want to have the resources to ensure a smooth recovery from spine surgery. Be sure to ask about post-surgery recovery education and treatment plans.



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Complete your
checklist
on next page.



- Is the spine surgeon you're considering board certified?
- How much experience does the spine surgeon have in the surgery you are considering?
 - › How many procedures have they done?
 - › What's their infection rate?
 - › What are patient outcomes for that particular surgery?
- What type of spine surgery team does your spine surgeon/spine surgery center offer?
- Does the spine surgery center you are considering offer a range of surgeries?
- Will your spine surgery happen at a hospital or surgery center?
- Does your spine surgeon have experience with both as well as inpatient and outpatient procedures?
- Will the same advanced practice provider (APP) who was part of your initial consultation be part of your inpatient team?
- What will your care team look like if you are an inpatient?
- What types of pre and post spine surgery education do they offer?



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