

Cardiac Clearance before Outpatient Total Joint Surgery: FAQ's

Who needs cardiac clearance before surgery?

1. Anyone with a history of heart disease, including heart arrhythmias, stents, or heart surgery
2. Anyone 70 years and older

Why would a stress test be recommended if I'm 70 years old and have a normal EKG and my Primary Care says I am healthy?

1. Approximately 10% of people over 70 who have no symptoms or EKG abnormalities have underlying heart disease
2. The main symptoms of heart disease are shortness of breath with walking, chest pain with activity and abnormal heart beats
3. Patients with arthritis often are unable to do activities that cause the heart symptoms because of the pain they have with walking

When did Dr. Swank start requiring his patients to have a preoperative cardiac clearance?

1. In the late 1990's, Dr. Swank had approximately 5% of the patients he operated on have a cardiac related event in the first 90 days after surgery. When he reviewed the medical history of these patients, they all had been seen by their primary care physician and had normal EKGs and had been appropriately cleared for surgery
2. Dr. Swank discussed these cases with the head of cardiology, Dr. Don Wayne and the head of cardiac surgery Dr. Russel Vester to figure out how to detect the underlying heart disease in these asymptomatic patients
3. Their recommendation was to perform stress tests on every 70 and over in otherwise asymptomatic patients
4. Dr. Swank immediately implemented Cardiac Clearance from a Cardiologist with a possible stress test around 1999

What has been the outcome since instituting this protocol?

1. In over 15,000 surgeries since that time, Dr. Swank has not had a single cardiac death in asymptomatic patients who passed the cardiac stress test
2. The screening continues to identify 1-2 patients a month who had no symptoms and a normal EKG who fail a stress test and are found to have significant cardiac issues that we treat before the elective joint replacement surgery
3. Dr Swank's medical complication rate remains substantially lower than national and local averages
4. Due to the cost and implementation of a stress test Dr. Swank has deferred to Cardiologists to know when to utilize a stress test before surgery.

Why does Dr. Swank want the cardiac clearance *before* he schedules your surgery?

1. Scheduling surgery involves a significant time commitment for you and your families
2. You may have to arrange for home care, for family members to take off work, drive them to doctor appointments, lab work, physical therapy, etc., many of these things have a cost associated with them that you must pay for
3. If a scheduled surgery gets canceled because of cardiac reasons, then all of these things need to be rescheduled- creating a major inconvenience and often significant cost to you
4. Obtaining cardiac clearance beforehand prevents you from incurring these costs and streamlines the surgical process for you

How do I obtain cardiac clearance?

1. We recommend you call your primary care physician for a referral
2. If you are having difficulty making an appointment with a cardiologist, Dr. Swank's staff will help you with this process

What happens once you have obtained your clearance for surgery?

1. Reach out to Dr. Swank's surgical scheduler to begin the surgical planning process