

# CHEST X-RAY BEFORE SURGERY

A procedure at risk of being overused, as indicated by the: Italian Society of Medical Radiology

Before surgery of any kind, patients are often requested to undergo a chest x-ray.

The idea is that this may lead to identifying problematic conditions (for example, an abnormal enlargement of the heart or the presence of liquid in the lungs) that would prohibit surgery, lead it to be postponed or necessitate certain precautions.

In reality, it is an overused procedure. If there are not specific reasons tied to the patient's medical history or the presence of certain symptoms identified during a medical examination, performing a routine chest x-ray before surgery is not recommended. In the absence of specific symptoms, a chest x-ray rarely leads to significant changes in the management of the problem and doesn't contribute to improving the patient's health. A careful examination prior to surgery and an understanding of the patient's medical history is generally all that is needed.

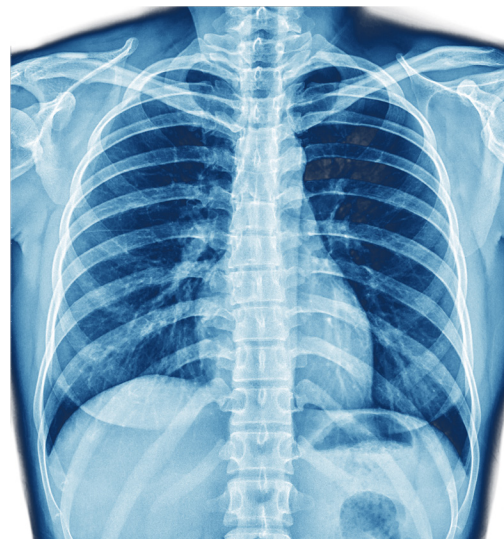
## LET'S UNDERSTAND WHY

If the patient does not have specific symptoms or explicit risk factors, an x-ray in all likelihood will prove fruitless. Conversely, it is not without side effects.

Every x-ray examination exposes our body to a dose of electromagnetic radiation. As the risks associated with radiation exposure

are compounded, it is best to avoid every occasion of unnecessary exposure as much as possible.

Like any exam, a chest x-ray may lead to identifying anomalies that are often harmless, that will however necessitate further exams to understand their nature. In this way, the patient will be further exposed unnecessarily to new risks, anxiety, and expenses.



Performing chest x-rays on all patients who are to have surgery is a significant burden on the healthcare facilities, both at the organizational and financial levels.

## WHEN A PREOPERATIVE CHEST X-RAY MAY BE RECOMMENDED

A chest x-ray prior to surgery may be recommended only if:

- there are symptoms of heart or lung problems, like a pain in the chest, cough, shortness of breath, swollen ankles, fever, recent heart attack, flu or illness of the lungs or bronchi that is not healing;
- if there are heart or lung problems, even without symptoms;
- for patients over 70 years old, if they haven't had a chest x-ray in over 6 months;
- if the surgery relates to the heart or the lungs.

## SURGICAL OPERATIONS: ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



Before undergoing any surgery, talk to your doctor until you have fully understood the reasons behind the surgery, possible risks and expected benefits. Always evaluate with your doctor whether there are alternative treatments or wait a certain period, keeping the problem under control, to evaluate if surgery is truly necessary.

Once the surgery has been confirmed, speak to your surgeon and anaesthesiologist and accurately describe your health conditions and medical history, namely current illnesses and any previous surgeries. Remember to accurately list all the medications, supplements and herbal products that you are taking, asking if you need to suspend their intake before surgery (this is the case, for example, with blood thinners, including baby aspirin, and generally all medications that thin the blood, including some painkillers).

Organize for your hospitalisation in advance, preparing the materials needed for your stay, and asking someone to accompany you there and pick you up.

To learn more: "Bruciore di stomaco?", Test Salute 106, October 2013 (in Italian) available on [www.altroconsumo.it](http://www.altroconsumo.it) in "magazine archive"

Project "Doing more does not mean doing better - Choosing Wisely Italy"  
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