

# Tackling the Top-Five: Unindicated Diagnostic Testing and Imaging in Low-Risk Patients Prior to Low-Risk Surgery

## WHAT



- Low-risk patients undergoing low-risk surgery do not need many commonly provided blood tests, imaging services, and more. The list of unnecessary tests recommended to avoid by choosing wisely is exhaustive. Examples include:
  - [Tests before heart surgery](#)
  - [Heart stress tests before surgery](#)
  - [Medical tests before eye surgery](#)
  - [Echocardiogram before surgery](#)
  - [Stress tests before surgery](#)
  - [Lab tests before surgery](#)
  - [Chest x-rays before surgery](#)

## WHY

- Unneeded tests and imaging tests often come with risks that far outweigh any benefit:
  1. Rarely change patient management
  2. Identify clinically insignificant abnormalities (that lead to more cost and more harm)
  3. Delay needed care (opportunity cost)
  4. In some cases, risk exposure to radiation or other iatrogenic harm
- Unindicated diagnostic testing has a high “waste-index” (% of times the services is used divided by the % of times it used wastefully.)

## BURDEN

- Nationwide in 2014: estimated 19 million unneeded pre-surgery tests/images performed, resulting in about **\$9.5 billion** in spending.
- In 2018: Washington Health Alliance measured a combined **\$85.2 million** in pre-operative baseline studies in otherwise healthy individuals across all Health Waste Calculator measures of potentially wasteful pre-operative testing.

### How to measure:

- [Specifications for claims-based analyses](#) to measure wasteful utilization and spending in-house, based on previous studies to measure Top Five.
- [The Milliman MedInsight Health Waste Calculator](#)

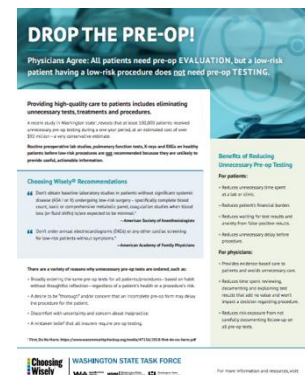
**Clinical Evidence and Choosing Wisely Guidelines:** see the links at the top of the page.

### Barriers to action and counterpoints:

- Pre-operative testing can be a significant source of revenue for providers and laboratory systems
- As with all Top Five services, there are clinical indications that would make a pre-operative test necessary.
- *“All patients should be assessed prior to surgery, but not all patients need pre-operative testing.”* - IHA

### Case studies, external resources, and model language:

- [Washington Health Alliance: Drop the Pre-op](#)
- [American Medical Association: Drop the Pre-Op](#) (Choosing Wisely: Canada)
- [RFI language to discuss low-value care with your TPA or carrier.](#)



**DROP THE PRE-OP!**  
Physicians Agree: All patients need pre-op EVALUATION, but a low-risk patient having a low-risk procedure does not need pre-op TESTING.

Providing high-quality care to patients includes eliminating unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures.

A recent study in Washington state found that at least 100,000 patients received unnecessary pre-op testing before a low-risk surgery or procedure and that 80% of that testing was not necessary.

Reducing unnecessary pre-operative testing before surgery or procedure can help reduce costs and improve patient care. It can also help reduce the risk of unnecessary testing and the associated costs.

**Choosing Wisely® Recommendations**

• Don't do unnecessary laboratory testing or imaging without significant clinical reason (EKG or stress testing before low-risk surgery, chest X-ray before low-risk surgery, heart stress testing before low-risk surgery, medical tests before low-risk surgery, echocardiogram before low-risk surgery, chest x-rays before low-risk surgery).

• Don't order an oral electrocardiogram (ECG) or an other cardiac screening test unless there is a clinical indication.

—American Academy of Family Physicians

There are a variety of reasons why unnecessary pre-op tests are ordered, such as:

- Being unsure of the next step to take for all patients/conditions based on their individual health/care needs – regardless of patient health or a procedure risk.
- A desire to be “thorough” and/or concern that an unnecessary pre-op test may help the procedure go better.
- Discomfort with uncertainty and concern about litigation.
- A “culture shift” that all doctors require pre-op testing.

This fact sheet is available at <https://www.choosingwisely.org/choosing-wisely-2018-drop-the-pre-op/>

**For patients:**

- Ask your doctor if you need any pre-op tests.
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**For physicians:**

- Don't do unnecessary pre-op tests unless there is a clinical indication.
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**Choosing Wisely** WASHINGTON STATE TASK FORCE

For more information and resources visit [www.choosingwisely.org](http://www.choosingwisely.org)