

# Choosing a Hospital and Surgeon

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I'm Dr Jonathan Salo, a Cancer Surgeon at the Levine Cancer Institute.

.font60[If you're seeing this video, it's likely because you have a recent diagnosis of esophageal cancer.]

This video is designed to help you choose a surgeon and hospital for your esophagectomy surgery.

Plan

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When it comes to surgery for esophageal cancer, we're all interested in getting the best outcome possible. The goals of any operation are rapid recovery, being able to return to activities, and a low risk of complications. Esophageal surgery is a substantial operation, so it's even more important to increase the chances of a good outcome.

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There are several factors which can change the odds of a good outcome:

Patient factors

Hospital and the Surgeon

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## Patient factors

If you haven't do so already, please watch our video on Esophageal Surgery. There's a link above and one in the description below

In that video, we talk about the importance of muscle strength and nutrition for a a good outcome after esophageal surgery.

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The good news is that with proper nutrition and exercise, you can increase your muscle strength and reduce your chances of complications after surgery.

In this video, we'll talk about the impact of the hospital and the surgeon on outcomes after surgery.

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## Understanding Outcomes

We're going to start by talking about outcomes after surgery and how statistics can help you make a decision about your surgery. Let's talk Baseball for a minute.

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## Baseball

.pull-left[ If you go to a baseball game and want to know how a team is doing, you look at the scoreboard ]

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.pull-left[If you want to evaluate an individual baseball player, you want to know more than how they did in one game: you would look at their batting average ]

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.pull-left[Micky Mantle is regarded as one of baseball's greatest players, and this baseball card from 1952 is one of the most valuable in history.]

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.pull-left[If you look at the back of his card, you'll find lots of statistics, including his ... batting average]  
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The batting average allows fans to compare players. A player with a high batting average doesn't hit a home run every time, but a player with a high batting average is certainly going to help win more games. The batting average won't absolutely predict what will happen with every time a player goes to bat, but it shows an *average* over the season or over a career.

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When you choose a surgeon or a hospital for your esophagectomy, you want to find the best chance of success. Unfortunately, there aren't baseball cards for hospitals and surgeons, and finding the statistics for a hospital or surgeon can be a challenge, but it's still important to help you make a decision.

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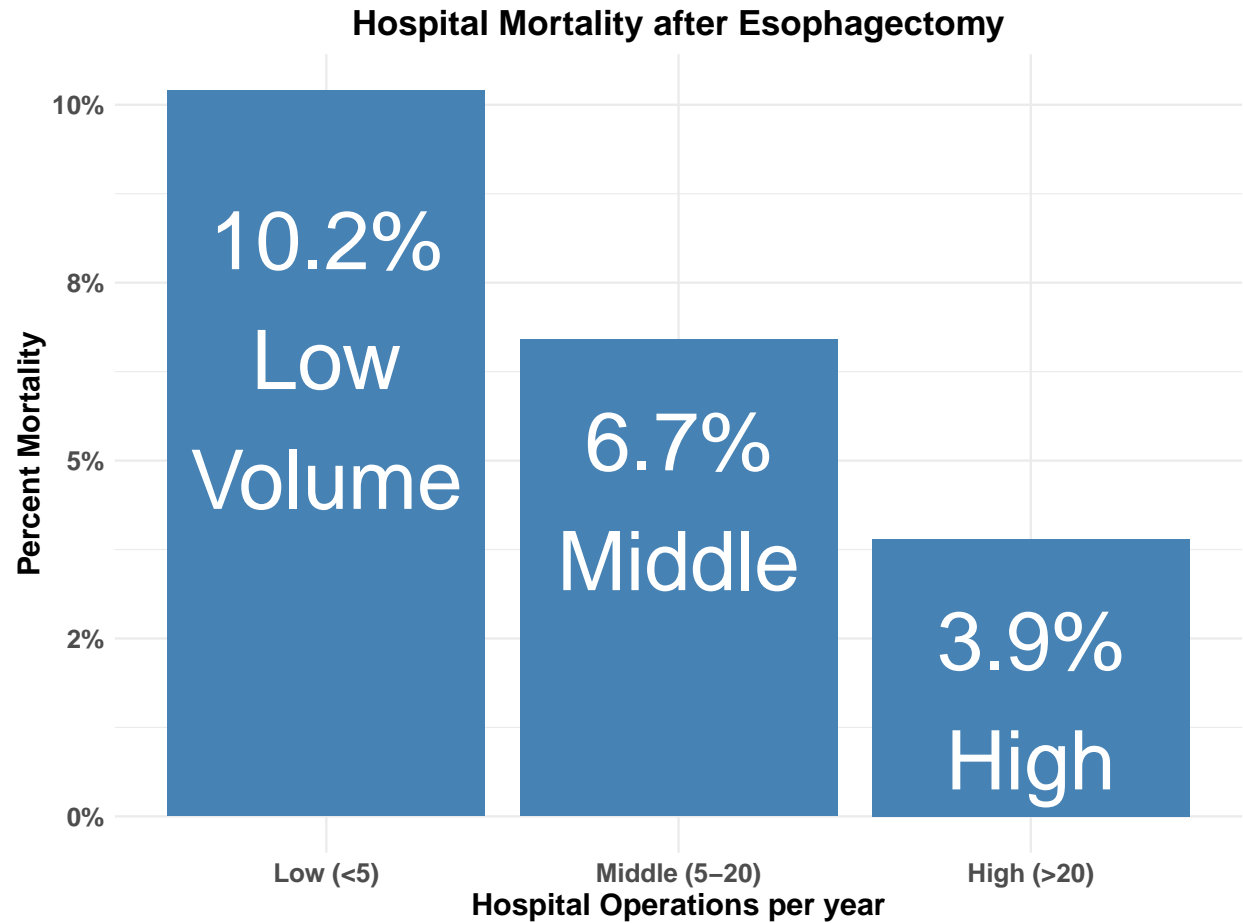
## Hospital Volume

Practice makes perfect in many things in life, and esophageal surgery is no exception.

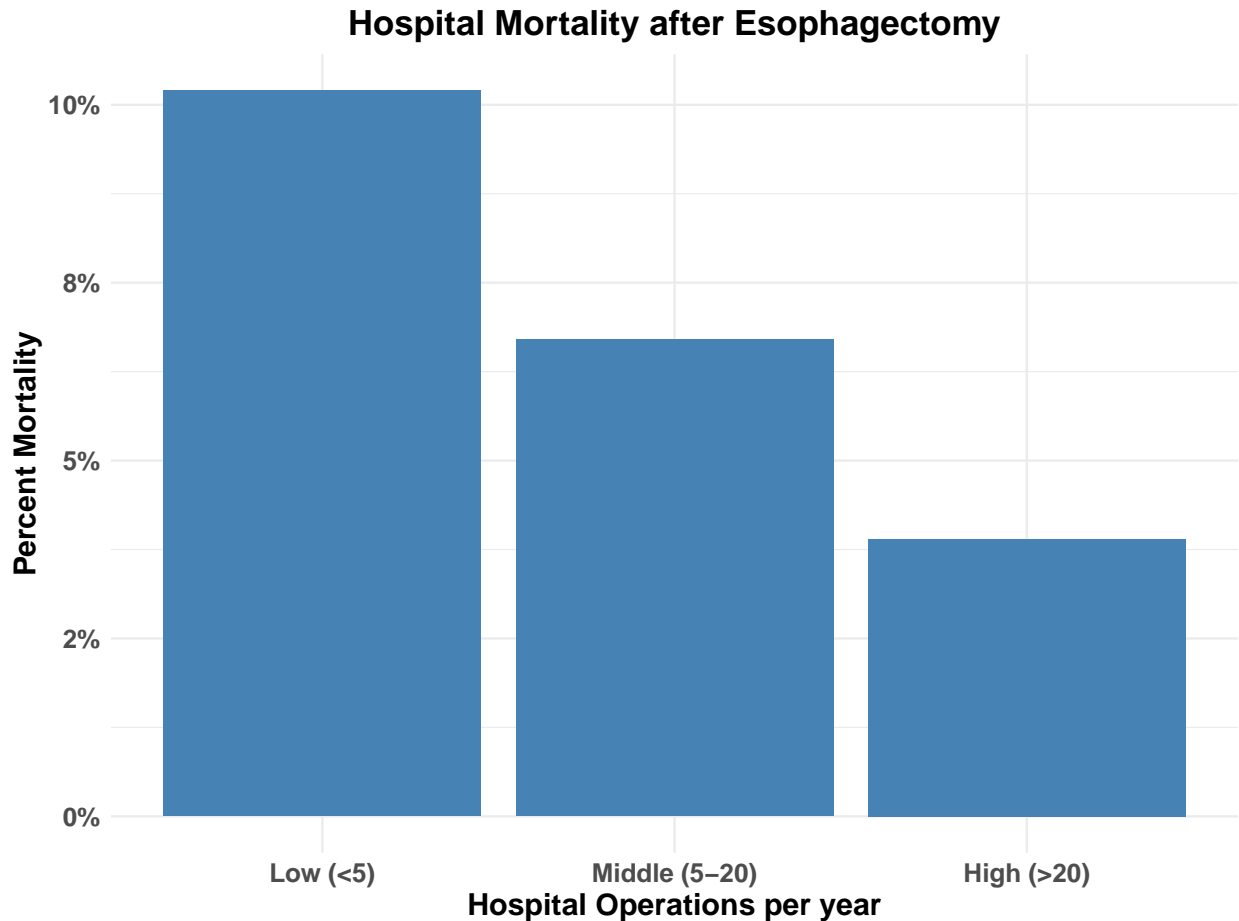
Hospitals where an esophagectomy is performed more frequently *in general* have better outcomes than hospitals where the operation is only occasionally done.

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This chart shows the relationship between hospital volume and the risk of death after esophagectomy.



The risk of death after esophagectomy is about twice as high in hospitals which perform less than 5 esophagectomy operations per year.



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The easiest way to find out whether a hospital is high volume or low volume is to ask your surgeon.

You could also check the internet. The Leapfrog Group is a non-profit organization that collects and publishes safety information healthcare. Their website ranks hospitals for safety and can help you find a high-volume hospital.

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You can find a link to the Leapfrog website in the description: [HospitalSafetyGrade.org](https://www.hospitalgrade.org)

You can search on a hospital. Once there, you can click “View this hospital’s leapfrog Hospital Survey Results”

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Of course there are low-volume hospital that have good outcomes, but starting with a high-volume hospital is a place to start.

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## Choosing a Surgeon

The surgeon is another key factor in the outcome of an operation. The Leapfrog recommends a minimum of seven operations per year for surgeons undertaking esophagectomy.

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## Your Surgeon's Outcomes

Knowing your hospital's outcomes is important, but knowing your surgeon's outcomes is equally important. Your surgeon should be able to tell you what their statistics are for outcomes like anastomotic leak, pneumonia, and death after surgery. These are discussed in the video about surgery.<sup>12</sup>Eso\_Surgery

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If your surgeon doesn't know their personal statistics for performing an esophagectomy, you may want to consider a second opinion. After all, if you met a professional baseball player, you would expect that they would be familiar with their batting average.

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## Risk assessment

As we discuss in the video on esophagectomy surgery, the patient's overall health, particularly their muscle strength, is an important factor in predicting the risk of complications after surgery.

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If you haven't done so already, I would recommend watching our video on esophageal surgery. There's a link in the description below

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When you meet with your surgeon, part of the consultation will be a preoperative evaluation of your overall health and your personal risk of complications after surgery.

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As part of the preoperative evaluation, your surgeon may order additional tests such as consultations, especially to evaluate the health of your heart or lungs.

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## Questions for Your Surgeon

- 1) How many esophagectomy operations are performed each year in your hospital?
  - 2) How many esophagectomy operations do you perform personally each year?
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3) What are *your* overall rates of complications?

- Pneumonia
- Anastomotic Leak
- Death in the first 90 days after surgery

4) What sort of testing of my overall health will be needed before surgery?

5)

**what would you estimate *my* risk of complications based upon your evaluation?**

I hope have found this video helpful. If you or a family member have had an encounter with esophageal cancer surgery, I would love to hear about your experience, so please take a minute to leave a comment below. We're constantly creating new videos, so please subscribe to be notified of new videos when we post them.

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Link Out