PREPARING YOUR INFANT FOR SURGERY

Recognizing what is stressful to your infant while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- Separation from parents
- Many different caregivers
- Inability to eat due to medical or surgical reasons
- Strange sights, sounds and smells
- New and different routines
- Interrupted sleep
- Confusion of day and night

How do I prepare my infant for surgery?

- The most important aspect about preparing your infant for surgery is preparing yourself for what to expect on the day of surgery. Being informed and asking questions will alleviate some of your own concerns or fears.
- Simplify your routine. Try not to add unnecessary busyness or activity and try to keep your baby’s routine the same before the day of surgery.
- Try to remain calm since your baby can sense if you are stressed and may also feel stressed.
- Try to get as much rest as possible the night before surgery.
- Bring your baby’s favorite cuddle toy, music or security blanket from home to help create a more familiar environment for your baby.
- Utilize the playroom for distraction, walk the halls, try rocking or a warm blanket to comfort your baby during the time before surgery when he/she cannot eat or drink.

How do I help my baby during recovery?

- Make plans to be with your baby as much as possible so that he/she will have a familiar touch, voice and smile. Plan to be with your baby in the recovery area.
- Let the nursing staff know what your baby’s usual schedule is, including sleep patterns and feeding habits.
- Take care of yourself and take breaks. Ask for help from family and friends when you need it.

Contact the Child Life Specialist at 720.754.7712 or 303.839.7717 to learn more about preparing your infant for surgery.
PREPARING YOUR TODDLER FOR SURGERY

Recognizing what is stressful for your toddler while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

• Being left alone
• Painful procedures
• Medical equipment that looks and sounds scary
• Having to stay in a strange bed or room
• Loss of comforts of home, family and belongings
• Being in contact with unfamiliar people
• Feeling helpless

How do I prepare my toddler for surgery?

• Toddlers can benefit from preparation one or two days before surgery. Preparation too far in advance can produce more anxiety. Contact the Child Life Specialist for assistance in preparing your toddler.
• Familiarize your toddler with surgical hats and masks by playing with the equipment on a doll or stuffed animal.
• Read books to your toddler about going to the hospital.
• Give very simple explanations and try to use less threatening words (ex. say a “poke” versus a “shot”).
• When possible, before and after surgery, allow your child to choose a play activity in the playroom for normalcy and to decrease the anxiety related with hospitalization.

How do I help my toddler during recovery?

• Stay with your toddler during the hospitalization as often as you can. Your touch and voice will comfort him/her more than anything else.
• Keep routines from home as consistent as possible when in the hospital (ex. stories before bedtime) and continue to maintain behavioral boundaries.
• Bring some of your toddler’s comfort items or favorite activities from home. This can include favorite stuffed animals, blankets, movies, books, toys, etc.
• Give your toddler realistic choices so he/she has some control. For example, let your child decide if he/she would rather color or play with toys.
• Let the medical staff know your toddler’s typical routine along with likes and dislikes.
• Be patient. It is not uncommon for toddlers to regress and have angry outbursts and tantrums.
• Take care of yourself. Simplify your life during this time and do not be afraid to ask for help from family and friends. Remaining positive and calm can help reduce your toddler’s anxiety.
Helpful books for you and your child:

- Franklin Goes To The Hospital by Paulette Bourgeois with Brenda Clark (Illustrator)
- Little Critter: My Trip To The Hospital by Mercer Mayer
- Harry Goes to the Hospital: A Story for Children About What It’s Like to Be in the Hospital by Howard J. Bennett, M.D. with M.S. Weber
- The Surgery Book: For Kids by Shivani Bhatia, M.D.
- Brave Little Megan by Alison Brock

Contact the Child Life Specialist at 720.754.7712 or 303.839.7717 to learn more about preparing your toddler for surgery or to arrange a pre-operative tour.
PREPARING YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD FOR SURGERY

Recognizing what is stressful for your school-age child while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- Thinking he/she is in the hospital because he/she is bad or being punished
- Fear of body injury, mutilation and never being well again
- Feeling a loss of control or loss of your love
- Fear of pain
- Fear of anesthesia
- Fear of waking up during surgery
- Modesty concerns
- Being away from school and friends

How do I prepare my school-aged child for surgery?

- Learn as much as you can about your child's surgery. The more you know, the better you will be able to help explain things to your child.
- When possible, school-age children should be prepared a week or two before surgery since preparation too far in advance can produce more anxiety.
- Make sure your child knows why he/she is having surgery in words he/she can understand.
- Give simple explanations and try to use less threatening words (ex. say a “poke” versus a “shot”).
- Contact the Child Life Specialist to arrange a hospital tour and preparation session for your child before surgery. Touring the hospital can help your child see the sights, sounds and events he/she will experience the day of surgery and give him/her time to talk about concerns and questions.
- Have your child explain back to you what is going to happen in the hospital. School-aged children sometimes will listen carefully, but will not understand all that was said. This can help you to learn whether or not your child has a clear understanding of what lies ahead.
- Let your child know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry. Encourage him/her to ask questions of the physicians and nurses.

How do I help my school-age child during recovery?

- Arrange for yourself or a trusted family member or friend to stay with your child as much as possible. Always tell your child when you are leaving, why and when you will be back.
- Continue to provide explanations regarding hospitalization, recovery and what to expect to give your child a sense of understanding and control.
- Stress and hospitalization may cause your child to start regressing and/or displaying new fears, such as being afraid of the dark. Give encouragement, compliments and hugs.
- Bring some of your child’s comfort items or favorite activities from home. This can include favorite pillows, stuffed animals, blankets, movies, books, game systems, toys, etc.
- Encourage your child’s family and friends to visit the hospital, or to keep in touch with your child by telephone or with letters and cards.

>>>
PREPARING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN continued

Helpful books for you and your child:

- Franklin Goes To The Hospital by Paulette Bourgeois with Brenda Clark (Illustrator)
- Little Critter: My Trip To The Hospital by Mercer Mayer
- Harry Goes to the Hospital: A Story for Children About What It's Like to Be in the Hospital by Howard J. Bennett, M.D. with M.S. Weber (Illustrator)
- The Surgery Book: For Kids by Shivani Bhatia, M.D.
- Brave Little Megan by Alison Brock

Contact the Child Life Specialist at 720.754.7712 or 303.839.7717 to learn more about preparing your child for surgery or to arrange a pre-operative tour.
PREPARING TEENAGERS FOR SURGERY

Recognizing typical concerns and reactions of this age group will help you prepare your adolescent for surgery. Adolescents like to be active participants in deciding what happens to them, which also includes their hospitalization. When adolescents are included in making decisions regarding their healthcare they are more compliant and cope more effectively. Common fears and concerns may include the following:

- Loss of control
- Being away from school and friends
- Concerns about what others will think about them being sick or in the hospital
- Fear of surgery and its risks
- Fear of waking up during surgery
- Having a part of his/her body damaged or changed in appearance
- Fear of dying during surgery
- Fear of pain
- Fear of the unknown

How do I prepare my teenager for surgery?

- For a teenager, learning and preparing for surgery should start as soon as the decision to have surgery is made. Reading books, talking with others who have had similar surgeries and researching articles can be a good start.
- Allow your teen to be part of the decision-making process. Encourage him/her to make a list of questions to ask the physicians.
- Contact the Child Life Specialist for additional resources and to schedule a hospital tour. This tour will include age-appropriate explanations, demonstrations with actual medical equipment and a chance for your teenager to ask questions and express concerns.
- Explain procedures or what to expect in different ways. Teenagers are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand an explanation.
- Discuss with your teenager his/her preference in disclosing information to friends at school about the surgery and whether he/she would like visitors.
- Encourage your teenager to bring activities from home to keep busy, such as a game system, favorite book, music, etc.
- Give permission for your teenager to show or talk about his/her emotions. It may be helpful to share that you also have some of the same worries as they do.
- Be truthful when answering questions. How information is disclosed is often as important as what information is given. Teenagers have the right to know what is wrong with their bodies and what will happen.

How do I help my teenager during recovery?

- A journal may be a helpful outlet for your teenager to express feelings, concerns and thoughts about his/her surgery.
- Be patient and understanding with your teenager. Teens may experience frequent mood swings while in the hospital. There may be times when your teenager is withdrawn and does not want to talk or answer questions.
- Advocate that your teenager’s privacy is respected — including their thoughts, feelings and bodies.

Contact the Child Life Specialist at 720.754.7712 or 303.839.7717 to learn more about surgery preparation for teenagers or to arrange a pre-operative tour.
PREPARING SIBLINGS WHEN A BROTHER OR SISTER IS HAVING SURGERY

When your child goes to the hospital, brothers and sisters may feel afraid, worried or confused. They may also have to deal with being away from one or both parents, missing their brother/sister and possibly having to stay with other family or friends. The following are some of the common feelings siblings may have during this time:

- **Loneliness** - They miss having their brother/sister to play with and their parents around for care and comfort.
- **Worry** - If they are not told about what is happening, brothers and sisters may feel like they are not important. They may worry about who will take care of them and may assume their needs will not be met.
- **Jealousy** - Brothers and sisters often wish that they were the ones getting all the attention or presents from family and friends, and become resentful and/or jealous of their brother/sister.
- **Guilt** - Siblings may feel bad for having mean thoughts about their brother/sister, or may even feel like it is their fault their brother/sister is in the hospital. They might feel guilty for being healthy, when their brother/sister is ill.
- **Fear** - They may think they can “catch” something from the sick brother/sister. They may be afraid the sick child will never come home or that when they get sick they will have to go to the hospital, too.

**How do I prepare my other children for their sibling’s surgery?**

- Include siblings in conversations about their brother's or sister's surgery, in words they can understand, while providing a simple explanation for why their brother/sister is going to the hospital.
- Make sure brothers and sisters know that some other responsible adult will be caring for them during the time you have to be at the hospital and that you will come back as soon as you can.
- Read books with the entire family about going to the hospital.
- Ask siblings what questions and concerns they have and address those issues.

**How will children at home show they are stressed?**

The following are the most common signs that a child is under stress. However, each child may display signs of stress differently. Signs may include:

- Eating changes (eating less than usual, eating more than usual, or being picky about what he/she will eat)
- Not wanting to talk or be with family members
- “Too good” behavior
- Doing things to get in trouble and get attention
- Need for a lot of hugs and attention
- Saying they feel sick, too

---
How can I help the siblings at home?

- Keep care routines at home as normal as you can.
- Try to set aside private time for you and your children at home so that they receive some special attention.
- Give many compliments and hugs. Take extra time to notice good schoolwork or jobs done at home.
- Let the children at home know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry.
- Tell the truth when you answer your children's questions. Please keep in mind the importance of using simple explanations that your child can understand.
- Have your children at home draw pictures or make cards to send to the hospital.
- Set up times for your children to talk to each other on the phone or to visit. Check with the Child Life Specialist about the possibility for a visit.

Helpful books for you and your child:

- **When Molly Was In The Hospital: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Hospitalized Children** by Debbie Duncan with Nina Ollikainen, MD (Illustrator)

- **What About Me? When Brothers and Sisters Get Sick** by Allan Peterkin, M.D. with Frances Middendorf (Illustrator)

Contact the Child Life Specialist at 720.754.7712 or 303.839.7717 to learn more about supporting siblings or to arrange a visit.