

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SURGERY



At MU Children's Hospital, we know that surgery can be an overwhelming, often frightening experience for children and families.

Talking with your child about what to expect ahead of time may help your child feel less afraid.

SOME THINGS TO DO BEFORE COMING TO THE HOSPITAL FOR SURGERY:

- Listen to your child.
- Be honest about what will happen.
- Use short, simple terms to explain things.
- Encourage questions and expression of fears.
- Let your child know that having to go to the hospital does not mean they have done something wrong.
- Explain that he/she will have special medicine to help their body not be awake during surgery and that he/she will wake up when the procedure is over.
- Reassure them that if something hurts there are ways to help the pain including medicine, relaxation and distraction.
- Emphasize that the hospital stay is temporary and focus on what your child will be able to do when they go home.

Children understand things based on their developmental level and age. The younger the child, the closer to the event you should prepare them.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL TO YOU:

FOR ANY AGE CHILD: Pack some special items from home to help your child feel more comfortable during their hospital stay. A favorite toy can serve as a security blanket and can accompany your child into surgery, the recovery room or the intensive care unit. For older children, a favorite pillow or blanket may also offer comfort.



INFANTS AND TODDLERS: Infants and toddlers find the most comfort in familiarity with caregivers. A calm caregiver helps promote a calm child. If you need to be away for periods of time during your child's visit, plan for a family member or friend to be with your child.



PRESCHOOLERS: As a child gets older, he can be told about going to the hospital and what to expect once there. It is very important to give clear, simple explanations and to tell the truth. Encourage conversation about the upcoming surgery. Being aware of your child's fears will be helpful to you, as well as the hospital staff. Rather than ask, "**How do you feel?**" try saying something like, "**I bet you're wondering what will happen when we get to the hospital, aren't you?**" This approach is more likely to get your child to talk.

Kids in this age group vary greatly, so following your child's lead on the amount of information given is important. Offer reassurance that you'll do your best to be with him when you can and that other people will take care of him when you aren't there. And for a better idea of what a typical surgery day looks like, try reading through the surgery preparation coloring book.



**Children's
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SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN:

Depending on your individual child's abilities and needs, many of our suggestions for younger children can also be helpful for this age group. Please keep in mind that older children may want more details so they may ask more questions. It is okay to

tell your child if you don't know the answer and that there are people at the hospital to talk to for the answer. Write these questions down and bring them along on surgery day. Being upfront about what you know and don't know helps maintain trust with your child should things happen differently than you thought they might.

It's important for children to have a good idea of what to expect after surgery as well. Try to speak with your doctor prior to surgery for details on any special diet, cast/bandage, or tube/drain that may be in place when your child wakes up after surgery. Encourage your child to speak for himself, particularly around the issue of pain. There are medications to help manage pain but activities such as distraction, relaxation and deep breathing can often help along with pain medications. These techniques also offer children a bit more control over their situation.



TEENAGERS: Speak to your teenager honestly and respectfully about his upcoming surgery. Encourage your teenager to talk to the doctors and nurses and remember to include your teenager in discussions and decisions. This enables your teenager to feel a bit of control and foster independence. Your nonverbal cues are as important as your words: your facial

expressions, tone and body language can be powerful. If you appear anxious or scared, your teen might feel frightened, regardless of the words you choose.

Privacy is a big issue for teenagers. Reassure your teen that the hospital staff will be respectful by knocking and pausing before entering the room. Encourage your teenager to stay in contact with friends and family during their recovery through phone calls, Skype and cards. When appropriate, allow for visits from friends to maintain connections.

Contact Child Life Services for additional resources and ways to prepare and support your child before, during and after surgery.

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KID-FRIENDLY SURGERY WORDS

Surgery: a procedure where a doctor will make a small opening to fix or help a part of the body.

Surgeon: a doctor who does surgery.

Anesthesia: medicine that makes you stay asleep or take a nap during surgery. With this medicine you will not feel, hear or see anything.

Anesthesiologist: a doctor who gives you the medicine to sleep during surgery.

Mask: soft, clear, plastic mask used to give some anesthesia medicines.

Gas: special air that helps you go to sleep for surgery.

IV: small straw placed under skin to give you medicine.

Pre-op: the room you wait in before surgery.

Operating room (OR): the room where surgery happens.

PACU/Recovery Room: the room you wake up in after surgery.

Pulse ox: small bandaid with red light that allows doctors/nurses to know how you are breathing.

Monitors/leads: stickers connected to tiny wires that tell doctors/nurses how your heart is beating and how you are breathing.

Stretcher: bed with wheels.

Incision: a small opening the doctor makes on your skin.

Pain medicine: medicine to help you not hurt.