

Preparing for Your Child's Operation

Having an operation is a common childhood experience. However, if your child is scheduled for an operation, you are probably feeling a little bit nervous – no matter how simple the operation may be. At The Children's Hospital, our staff is specially trained to meet the needs of children and their families. We know from experience that our young patients and their parents or guardians have many questions about what happens when having an operation. We wrote this information sheet to help you and your child prepare for surgery.

Preparing Yourself:

The more you know about your child's operation, the more helpful and reassuring you can be. Here are some ideas to help you get ready for your child's surgery.

- Ask questions such as:
 - Why is this operation necessary?
 - How long will my child be in the hospital?
 - How will anesthesia be given?
 - How will my child look after surgery – will they need an IV or other equipment?
 - How will pain be controlled?
 - What type of care will my child require at home and for how long?
- Seek out family and friends or others who care about you and your child. A talk with a loved one can help ease the stress around an operation.
- Take care of yourself. Your child will count on you for support and comfort.

How do I talk to my child about surgery?

- Be honest. If your child asks a question that you cannot answer, say that you don't know, but you will try to find the answer to their question.
- Use familiar words. Use words that your child understands and that are non-threatening. For example, use "sore" instead of "pain." When describing an "anesthesiologist," you might say "sleep doctor." Say "small opening" instead of "cut."
- Talk about how the surgery will help your child. Let them know activities and school can be scheduled around their needs.
- Let your child know that you will be at the hospital during operation and that you will take him or her home afterwards.

What do I tell my child about surgery?

The following are just a few of the questions your child may ask before surgery. For more help in responding to your child's concerns, ask to speak with a Child Life Specialist or Therapeutic Recreation Specialist. These specialists have training in how to explain operations to children in easy to understand ways.

- *"Will it hurt?"*
You might say, "It won't hurt during the operation because the sleeping medicine protects you. But afterwards the place where you had your operation may feel sore. The doctor or nurse can give you medicine to help the soreness go away."
- *"Where on my body will the operation be done?"*
Point to the specific surgery site. Also, tell them what parts of the body the doctor won't

operate on.

- *“Who will do the operation?”*

You could say, “Doctors and nurses will do the operation. They will take good care of you and keep you safe the whole time. You will meet your nurse and sleep doctor before the operation.”

- *“Why can’t I eat or drink before my operation?”*

You might tell your child, “The sleeping medicine works best when there is no food in your tummy. After the operation you can eat when you feel hungry and your doctor says it is okay.

What other ideas and activities can help my child cope?

- Let your child make choices before and after surgery. For example, what would they like their sleep medicine to smell like? Which favorite toy or blanket would they like to take to the operating room with them?
- During waiting periods, provide play activities to help time pass quickly and positively.
- Include your child in planning a special activity to do after their operation such as a movie, a special book or a visit by a friend or family member.
- Encourage your child to draw pictures as a way to express his or her thoughts and feelings about the surgery. Ask them what they were thinking about when they drew their picture.
- Encourage your child to “play doctor” both before and after their operation. Use a doll or stuffed animal as the “patient.” This type of play may give you insight into your child’s thoughts and feelings.
- Suggest that your older child keep a journal of his or her thoughts and feelings about the surgery experience.
- Plan for some simple deep breathing exercises, alphabet or counting games, or squeezing mom or dad’s hand right before surgery or for discomfort afterwards.
- Read books about other children who have had operations. Many of these books are available in the Family Health Library on the first floor of the hospital.

What should I expect on the day of surgery?

- Before your child goes to surgery, you will speak to both the surgeon and the anesthesiologist. Be sure to ask about anything that is concerning either you or your child.
- About 20-30 minutes before your child’s operation is scheduled to begin, a staff member from the operating room will come to your child’s room. Please note that if an earlier surgery runs longer than expected or is completed earlier than anticipated, it may affect your child’s surgery start time.
- You and your child will go to the pre-surgical area in one of our operating units on the second floor. If you have not done so already, you will speak with the surgeon and/or anesthesiologist while in this area.
- When it is time for your child to go to surgery you will:
Give your child a hug and let them know you will see them as soon as they wake up, OR put on a paper hat and paper suit. Walk into the operating room with your nurse to be with your child during anesthesia induction.

- When your child is in the operating room, the following will occur: He/she will lie on the operating room bed. This bed is harder and a little narrower than most so a “seat belt” will be placed on your child.
 - Various monitors will be placed on your child. None of these monitors hurt.
 - Pulse oximetry to measure how much oxygen they are breathing. This is a small sticker that goes on either their finger or toe.
 - Blood pressure cuff to measure how their blood is pumping through their body. The cuff is placed either on their arm or leg. They will know the cuff is working because they may feel it squeezing as they go to sleep.
 - ECG buttons are three or four stickers that are hooked to a computer by small wires. This allows to doctors to know how fast your child’s heart is beating and how fast or slow your child is breathing. The stickers are usually placed on the chest. They may feel a bit cold or wet.

Now it is time for your child receive anesthesia and go into a deep “hospital sleep.” Remind your child that they will not feel, hear or see anything while they are in this deep sleep.

What should I do after my child is asleep?

The operating room staff will show you where the surgery waiting room is located. Check in with the volunteer at the desk. Let the volunteer know who you are and your child’s name. Please do not leave the hospital. If you leave the area, let the volunteer know and ask for a pager. Your child’s doctor will most likely come to the waiting area to talk with you about the operation.

In the surgery waiting area you will find complimentary coffee, tea and cocoa; a long-distance phone that parents can use free of charge, TV’s and a Kids’ Corner.

What happens when my child’s operation is finished?

After your child’s surgery, he/she will be taken to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU). (also called the Recovery Room). When your child begins to wake up, the recovery room nurse will call the volunteer at the desk in the surgical waiting area to let you know to come to the recovery room. Children waking up from anesthesia may cry and seem confused. This is a common reaction. Your child may also be breathing some extra oxygen – this is normal. If you have questions or concerns, the recovery room nurses can help. If your child feels sore or is hurting, please tell the nurse. They can give your child medicine that will help. Your child’s tummy may feel a little upset.

With certain types of surgery, some children go directly to one of our intensive care units instead of the Recovery Room. If this is the case for your child, you will be with your child as soon as possible in their intensive care room.

What might my child be like after surgery?

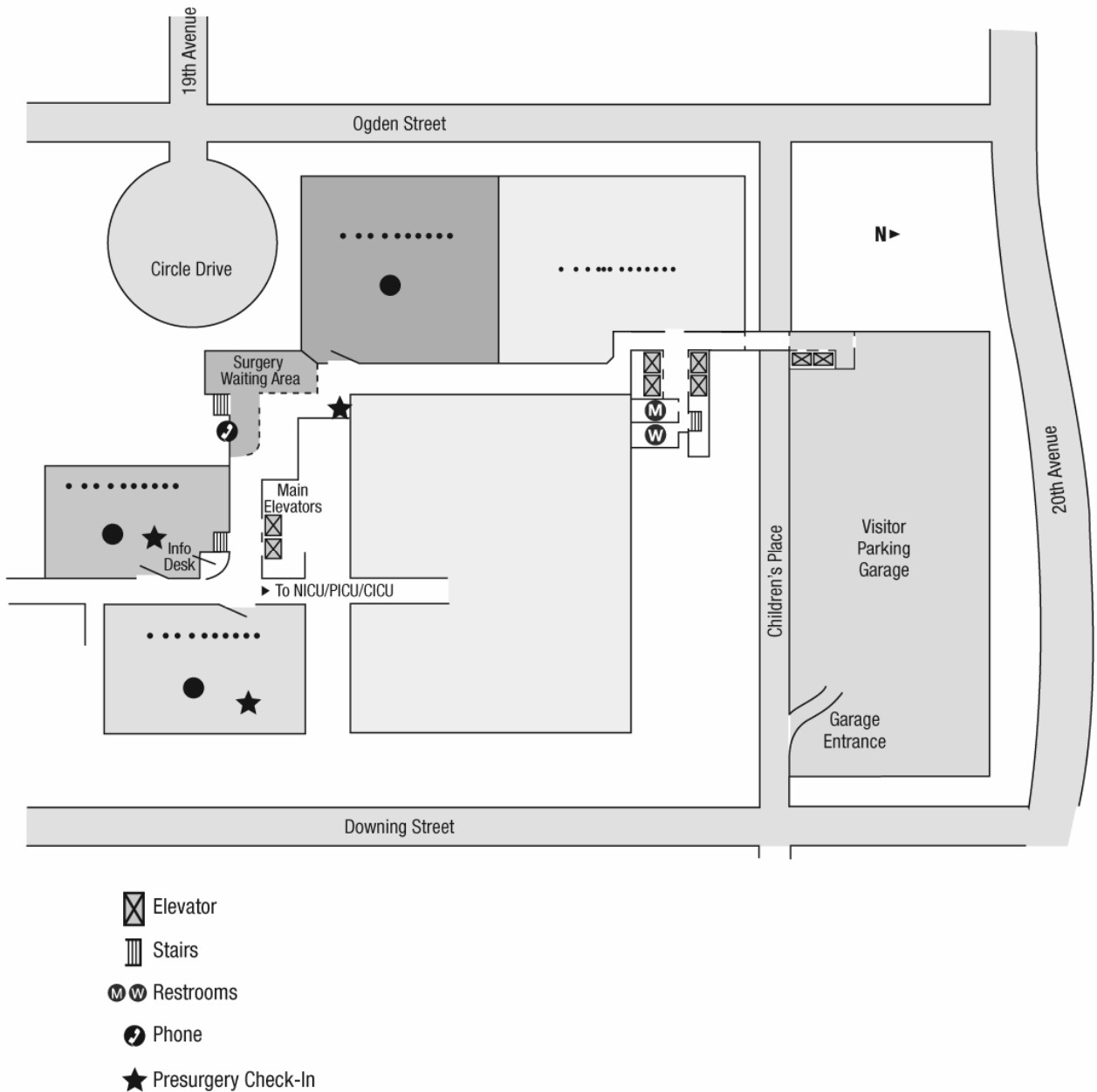
Children of all ages may behave differently after surgery. Young children may need more attention and may act cranky and demanding. They may have nightmares, poor appetites and bathroom accidents, even if they are toilet trained. Older children may regress, test limits or become withdrawn or clingy. These behavior changes are normal, especially for young children who have limited ability to understand and talk about their operation. For most children, behavioral changes after an operation are temporary, lasting a week or two, at most.

Support your child's return to a normal routine by:

- Being understanding
- Setting gentle limits
- Encouraging independence
- Giving them opportunities to play and talk about their operation.

If your child's behavior worries or concerns you, please speak with your nurse.

Here is a map of the surgical area.



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