

POWER OF KNOWING

An educational resource for patients and families.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SURGERY

The unknown is often scarier than the known

Surgery can be stressful for the patient and family especially if it is the first time. Knowing what to expect before and after can help to reduce this stress. Having information allows children time to process, ask questions, and share feelings.

How to help your child through surgery

- Ask questions. The staff is there to help you. You are part of the team in making decisions and the care provided for your child.
- Talk in a calm voice. Children can become more worried if parents are feeling stress.
- Be honest. Give simple information about surgery and what will happen.
- Avoid telling your child it won't hurt. The patient always determines their own pain and we can't always predict medical care.
- Give choices when possible.
- Offer activities to help distract if your child does not want to watch. Some children cope better by watching. This is ok if they are holding still.
- Encourage deep breathing and counting during painful events.
- Never punish a child for not cooperating. Find reasons to praise your child for what they are doing that is helpful (saying "you are doing a great job holding still", "good job breathing with me").
- Bring a comfort item to help with coping, wait times and separation.
- Children may wake up disoriented, agitated, and hard to console. This is normal. Your child may need to sleep a little more.

Child Life Services

A child life specialist is available to provide a general surgery preparation. This could include a picture book, discussion and exploration of medical equipment and it is based on your child's level of understanding. If you are interested please email: khchildlife@fakeeh.care to schedule before the day of surgery.

Helpful Tips

Infants:

Separate quickly when time for surgery, give a comfort item (blanket, pacifier, stuffed animal).

Toddlers:

Same as infants, show medical care on stuffed animal first, bring something new.

Preschool:

Same as toddlers, counting up and down, "I spy" books, slow breaths to blow away the pain.

School Age:

Talking about a favorite place, electronic games, identify a coping plan for events that seem stressful (cannula, separation), practice deep breathing.

Teens:

Imagine a favorite place, encourage slow deep breaths, research ahead of time about how the body works and the procedure.



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Encourage Fluids:

Some children have difficulty drinking after surgery (having tonsils removed) and sometimes they will refuse to drink or eat. This can increase the risk of dehydration and being admitted to the hospital. It is important to prepare your child for how their throat may feel and help them know that their most important job is to drink. You can say “Your throat may feel dry, or scratchy, or sore when you wake up. Drinking may be hard at first but it will help the sore feeling go away”. It is also important to share what could happen if your child does not drink (feel more sick, need to go to the hospital again) however, avoid making threats and help create a safe image of doctors and the hospital. You may need to try several tips to find the one that works.

Helpful Tips

- Set clear limits. Limit screen time and other distractions.
- Choose or make popsicles before the surgery.
- Choose a new spray bottle before the surgery. Sometimes the spray is more soothing and it can be a new fun way to drink.
- Use a game (UNO or Candyland). Pick a color and drink each time that color is played in the game.
- Let child put stickers in a line from top to bottom of cup. See the progress.
- Make a sticker chart. Earn a sticker for each drink and collect a prize after a certain number of stickers.
- Check with your nurse or doctor about the use of straws. This is not suggested for some surgeries but fun straws can help encourage drinking.
- Give a choice in the temperature of the drink. Room temperature may be more soothing.

Benefits of Preparation

Builds Trust

Not preparing or giving wrong information can reduce trust. It can make future visits more difficult.

Gives Control

Involving children in their care helps to give them a sense of control.

Clears up False Ideas

Many children have false ideas (punishment, not waking up). Explain simple reason for surgery. Explain “the doctor will give sleepy medicine and pain medicine so you can’t feel it. The doctor will stop giving sleepy medicine to help you wake up”.

Increases Cooperation

Allows time to discuss fears and find ways to get through something difficult.



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