



Parent Tips

- **Ask Questions**

Talk to your doctor and hospital staff so you know what to expect.

- **Be Honest**

Tell your child the truth about what will happen and how things will feel.

- **Listen**

Make sure to answer your child's questions and talk about any concerns.

- **Pack Special Items**

Bring pictures of your family, books, toys, a stuffed animal, blanket, pillow, schoolwork or even favorite pajamas to make the hospital feel more like home.

- **Prepare Siblings**

Remember to be open and honest with siblings, including them in surgery preparations when possible.

Speak to a Children's Health Child Life Specialist – they are available to help your child with additional preparation and support.



By your side,
preparing your
child for surgery.



A short stay in the hospital can be stressful for children. Routines are different. People are different. There are machines everywhere.

How can you help your child? How can you reduce stress? It might seem less stressful to avoid the topic altogether. But the truth is children benefit from honesty.

This pamphlet from Children's HealthSM, along with guidance from your Child Life Specialist, will help you talk to your child openly about surgery. Simply find your child's age range for more information and tips on preparing for surgery.



Want additional help relieving your child's fears and concerns about surgery?

Contact your Children's Health Child Life Specialist today at
Dallas - 214-456-3209 or 214-456-8118
Plano - 469-303-6280

Infants (Birth-12 Months)



Separation from parents or caregivers and the disruption of normal routines are stressful for infants during hospitalization. It's important to let the nursing staff know your baby's schedule, including sleep patterns and feeding habits. You can also help ease your baby's restlessness by doing the following.

Quality Time

If possible, plan to be with your baby as much as possible. Don't be afraid to take an active part in caring for your infant in the hospital.

Mood

Remember, infants take cues from parents or caregivers. It is important for you to be calm and relaxed for your child. The more calm and relaxed you are, the more calm and relaxed your child will be.

Support

Infants can become more fussy and harder to console during this time. Here are some tips to help:

- Bring familiar items from home (soothing music, blanket or toy)
- Speak softly to your child
- Hold and touch your baby often

Toddlers & Preschoolers (1-4 Years)



Children at this age might have false ideas about being in the hospital. Your child may think that he or she has done something wrong. They may feel guilty for having to come to the hospital. Reassure your child that he or she has not been bad by explaining their surgery to them. There are a number of ways to do this.

Simple Terms and Reiteration

Repetition is very important to help prepare your toddler or preschooler for the hospital. Going over the surgery a few days before and the day of in simple terms will help your child understand and cope. For example, you can use simple explanations like the following:

- The doctor is going to fix your ears.
- The doctor needs to do a test to see why your head hurts.

Books

Reading can also be a helpful tool for preparing your child for surgery. Familiar characters going to the hospital can help explain what surgery will be like.

Remember to make reading an open discussion and encourage questions.

Here's a list of few books you may want to consider:

- *Chris Gets Ear Tubes* by Betty Pace
- *Clifford Visits the Hospital* by Norman Bridwell (also available in Spanish)
- *Franklin Goes to the Hospital* by Sharon Jennings
- *Good-Bye Tonsils!* by Juliana Lee Hatkoff

Medical Play

To help your child work out their feelings or anxieties about an upcoming surgery, you can use medical play. This helps them understand their surgery and feel more comfortable going to the hospital. Play doctor kits are available at most toy stores.

School-Aged (5-12 Years)



Hospitalization can be very stressful for school-aged children because they tend to understand surgery, tests and broken routines more than toddlers and preschoolers. Children this age worry about body image and fear what their friends may think. All this can make it difficult to comfort your child. Below are some things to consider when preparing your child for surgery.

Time for Thought

It is good for older children to have more time to gather their thoughts. They need time to process the idea of surgery and develop logical questions. This will help clear up any false ideas that the child may have developed.

Body Image

One of the biggest fears at this age is body mutilation. It is important to be open and honest with children. Tell them exactly what will happen to their body during surgery, using pictures and medical play when possible.

Peer Approval

School-aged children may be concerned with how others perceive them. For example, children may be afraid of being seen as childish or babyish if they are scared or cry. It's important to talk to your child about their feelings and let them know these feelings are normal.

Adolescents (13-18 Years)



Although your teenager may act brave, surgery affects older kids just like younger ones. However, there's a fine line between being there for your child and being overbearing. It's important you give your teenager the space and privacy they need to deal with surgery on their own. The following information will help you better understand your teenager's feelings while at the hospital.

Independence

During the teen years, there is an increased need for independence. Being in the hospital may cause a lack of independence. It is important to let them make decisions whenever appropriate. This gives teens a sense of freedom.

Privacy

Privacy is another important issue when dealing with teens. Teenagers are private about their bodies, thoughts and feelings. They would rather express their feelings to a friend instead of a parent. It is important to respect their privacy and talk to them when necessary.

Control

Teenagers may feel a loss of control over themselves and their world while in the hospital. Encourage your kids to make a list of questions for the hospital staff and take them on a tour around the hospital. This will help them gain control of the situation and their surroundings.