

PACKING FOR HOSPITAL: A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

Craniofacial surgery can be a stressful experience for both children and parents. Being prepared can make the hospital stay more comfortable for everyone.

Every child's surgery and hospital stay will be a little different. While the checklists below cover a range of useful items, not everything will apply to your situation. Please use what is helpful and tailor your packing to suit your child's specific needs and expected length of stay.



FOR YOUR CHILD

- Comfortable, loose-fitting clothes (e.g. button-up or zip-front tops to avoid pulling clothes over their head). Pack a few extra items in case of vomiting or other accidents.
- Favourite comfort item (e.g. soft toy, blanket, or pillow)
- Entertainment (DVDs, storybooks, colouring, tablet + headphones)
- A few books to read aloud (hearing your voice can be comforting if their eyes are swollen shut)
- Fidget or sensory toys – toys that make familiar noises or provide something to hold and manipulate can help children self-soothe. They offer a comforting, hands-on distraction when your child feels uneasy.
- Music or white noise (to help them settle and sleep)
- Own bottles / dummies
- Own formula (if hospital-supplied formula isn't suitable)
- Expressing and storing breastmilk – Bring expressed milk from home or a breast pump and storage bags/bottles to express at the hospital. Hospitals can usually keep breastmilk in a fridge for you.
- Nappies & nappy rash cream

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PACKING FOR HOSPITAL: A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS (CONTINUED)

- Wipes
- Familiar snacks, such as purees, for when they start eating (check with your health-care team first)



FOR YOU

- Toiletries - toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, soap, lip balm
- Thongs for the shower (check that parents have access to shower facilities)
- Any medication you might need, including headache tablets, as hospitals will only provide medication for patients
- Comfortable, loose-fitting clothing — layers work best, as hospital temperatures can vary. It's a good idea to pack a few extra items in case of unexpected spills or vomiting.
- Slippers or slip-on shoes, so you can mobilise quickly if needed
- Sleepwear - and maybe a blanket, doona or pillow for your own comfort
- iPad, laptop, phone
- Charging cables and headphones/earbuds for any electronic equipment - consider taking extra long cables in case the power point is not close to the bed/chair
- Hospitals can be noisy, so taking earplugs may help reduce sleep disruptions
- A book to read
- Water bottle and non-perishable snacks for in-between meal times
- If there's a parent fridge available, you can store your own food. Take a marker with you so you can label your items.
- Notebook or phone app to jot down questions, notes, or care instructions

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IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

- Medicare and private health insurance cards
- Any medical directives you may have for your child
- Identification (ID) for both you and your child
- Copies of referral letters, surgical plans, and any specialist notes
- A current medication list for your child (and yourself, if relevant)



TRAVELLING INTERSTATE

If you're travelling interstate for your child's surgery, there may be extra things to think about. Some items will overlap with the main packing list, but you may also need to prepare for travel and time away from home.

- Car seat (if you're flying, check with the airline about bringing or hiring one)
- Pram or stroller for hospital corridors and recovery periods
- Travel documents (flights, bookings, parking passes, boarding passes)
- Extra snacks, formula, or breastmilk storage for travel days
- Travel-sized medical supplies (nappies, wipes, medications) for the journey itself
- Familiar comfort items in carry-on (toy, blanket, dummy)
- Accommodation near the hospital (e.g., Ronald McDonald House or hospital family accommodation services)
- Contact details for your child's healthcare team and hospital ward

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PACKING FOR HOSPITAL: A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS (CONTINUED)



EXTRA TIPS

- Check with the hospital, as some only allow one parent to stay overnight. This can be difficult for both parents, so being aware of their policy and preparing emotionally may help.
- Expect some waiting – pack something you can do to pass the time
- Ask questions – hospital staff are there to help
- Plan for flexibility – sometimes discharges are delayed or plans change
- Let someone know you're away – and organise support at home if needed
- Use a map to familiarise yourself with facilities and amenities around the hospital (e.g., nearby cafes, parks, gyms, or walking paths)

Taking the time to prepare can make a big difference, helping you to feel more confident and allowing you to focus on what matters most: supporting your child.

Remember, you're not alone. Craniofacial Australia and your healthcare team are there to guide you, every step of the way.

This information is based on the expertise of clinicians who work with families affected by craniofacial conditions and the lived experience of parents with children who have been diagnosed with craniosynostosis. We thank everyone who contributed to this fact sheet.



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How we can support you:

- Care packs
- Financial assistance
- Family support coordinator
- Connection to other families

