

## Fact Sheet 21

# WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY OF YOUR CHILD'S SURGERY

Being the parent of a child undergoing surgery can feel overwhelming, despite your best efforts to prepare. Knowing what to expect on the day can help you feel more confident and better able to support your child. While every hospital is different, most surgical days follow a similar routine.



### Before You Arrive

You will usually receive instructions from your surgical or pre-admission team a few days beforehand. This will include:

- Fasting instructions (when your child must stop eating and drinking)
- Arrival time at the hospital
- What to bring (e.g. comfort items, medications, paperwork). Fact sheet 15 (Packing for Hospital) also provides a list of items to take to hospital
- Where to go (specific hospital entrance or ward)

Make sure you follow fasting guidelines closely, as they are essential for your child's safety under anaesthetic.

### Arriving at the Hospital

You will be greeted by hospital staff and directed to the pre-surgery area. Here, you will:

- Check in at reception
- Meet the nurses, who will check your child's weight, temperature, and other basics
- See the anaesthetist, who will explain how they will safely keep your child asleep
- Speak with the surgeon, who will confirm the plan and answer any last-minute questions

Children are usually given a hospital gown to wear, and you will stay with them in a waiting area until it is time to go into the operating theatre.

*(continued overleaf)*



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## Going In for Surgery

When it is time for surgery, a nurse or theatre staff member will walk you and your child to the theatre doors. In some hospitals, one parent or carer can accompany their child into the anaesthetic room until they are asleep - in other hospitals this may not be possible.

- Anaesthetic is usually given via a mask or cannula (drip in the hand)
- Most children fall asleep quickly and do not remember this part
- A staff member will guide you back to the waiting area once your child is asleep (if you are still with them)

This moment can be emotional. It is okay to feel tearful or anxious — staff understand and will support you.

## During Surgery

You will either wait in a designated area or you may want to leave the hospital. How long surgery takes will depend on the type of procedure. Staff will:

- Keep you updated, especially for longer surgeries
- Let you know as soon as your child is in recovery

You may wish to bring something to read, snacks, or a support person. Fact sheet 1 (Activities During Surgery) gives you additional suggestions for ways to pass this time.

## After Surgery: Recovery Room

When surgery is over, your child will be moved to a recovery room. A nurse will monitor them as they wake up from the anaesthetic.

- A parent is usually called in as soon as your child starts waking
- Children may be drowsy, confused, or upset when they wake up — this is normal
- Your child may have an intravenous (IV) line (a soft tube usually placed in a vein in the hand or arm to provide medicine or fluids), dressings, or swelling depending on the surgery

Nurses will check pain levels, provide fluids or medications, and support comfort.

*(continued overleaf)*



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## Back on the Ward

Once your child is stable, you'll be transferred to a hospital room or ward - if a hospital stay is required.

- Nurses will continue monitoring and managing pain or nausea
- The surgeon may visit to explain how things went and what to expect next
- Your child may be sleepy for several hours or want to rest quietly

Depending on the type of surgery, your child may stay for one night or several.

## Going Home

Before discharge, your care team will:

- Explain wound care, medications, and what to watch for
- Give you a contact number in case of concerns
- Book or confirm follow-up appointments

You will also receive a written discharge summary with instructions.

## Supporting Your Child Emotionally

Surgery can be scary, especially for young children. You can help by:

- Staying calm and reassuring
- Bringing familiar items like a teddy or blanket
- Being honest but age-appropriate about what to expect
- Praising your child for being brave

Some children bounce back quickly; others may be clingy, tired, or emotional for a few days. This is normal.

Surgery day is just one part of your child's craniofacial journey. While it can be intense, it is also a step toward long-term health, function, and well-being

Your health care team is there to support both you and your child through the process. Do not hesitate to ask questions, share concerns, or ask for help at any point along 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

