

Preparing your teen for surgery (age 12 years and up)



Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

You can help prepare your teen for surgery. Preparing ahead of time can help:

- Calm your teen's fears.
- Make recovery easier and faster.
- Calm you as you focus on him, on what to expect and on how to care for him afterwards.

What are some common fears of teens?

Like all people, teens are sometimes afraid of certain things. Some common fears for teens include:

- Loss of control and independence
- How surgery might change their looks
- Surgery and its risks
- Pain and waking up during surgery
- What others will think about them being sick or being in the hospital
- Being away from school and friends
- Not having privacy
- Dying during surgery
- The unknown
- How surgery might affect what they can do in the future
- Parents and doctors not telling the truth

How can I help prepare my teen for surgery?

This list of tips can help you when you talk with your teen about surgery.

Talking with your child

- Prepare your teen as soon as you make the decision to have surgery. Explain the reason for having surgery.
- Allow your teen to have as much control as possible. Here are some ways to help him feel in control.
 - Have your teen help with the plans for surgery.
 - Give him choices when possible.
- Have your teen make a list of questions to ask the doctors and nurses.
- Talk about fears, and be honest. Teens need truthful information to build trust.
- Let your teen know that there is a doctor whose **only** job is to make sure that he stays asleep during the whole procedure. This doctor is called an anesthesiologist. Also, let your child know that:
 - He will not feel anything while he is asleep.
 - The doctor will stop giving him the anesthesia (air or medicine that helps him stay asleep) when the surgery is done. After this, he will wake up.
- Let your teen know that many other people, including those older and younger than him, have had the same type of surgery.
- Offer praise, positive reinforcement and support.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Preparing for surgery – teens, continued

Choosing your words

- Explain your teen’s surgery in words that he can understand. Have your teen explain back to you what will happen to make sure he understands.
- Teens may not admit that they do not understand everything. Use several ways to explain what will happen and why without making your teen feel awkward.

Visit the hospital

If possible, visit the hospital before the surgery.

- The Child Life department offers tours. A tour can help your teen learn about the hospital.
- This can also help your teen see the sights, sounds and events he will have the day of surgery.
- You and your teen will have a chance to ask questions.

The surgery

- Have your teen bring a few comfort items from home, such as hand-held video games, books, movies or music.
- Your teen may go through many mood swings while in the hospital. Be patient and understanding. Your teen may become withdrawn and not want to talk or answer questions. There are times when he may need to be alone.
- Let your teen know that it is OK to be afraid and cry. He might need to know that you have the same worries that he does. Let him know that you are there to support him.
- Let your teen know that you will be waiting close by during his surgery and will see him as soon as he gets back to his room.
- Help your teen to stay connected with friends.
 - Make time for visits or phone calls.
 - Ask friends to send cards or letters during the hospital stay or healing period.

Take care of yourself

- Make sure that you know about your teen’s surgery and know what to expect. This can help reduce your fears about it.
- Make sure that you, your teen and your family are well-rested.
- Take care of yourself. Your child can sense and react to your stress level.

The Child Life Department provides hospital tours for all children above the age of 3 years old.

- To arrange a tour at Egleston, please call 404-785-6325.
- To arrange a tour at Scottish Rite, please call 404-785-4286.

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