

# After anesthesia – caring for your child (Toddlers and school age children)

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## What is anesthesia?

Anesthesia is a type of medicine that is given to keep people comfortable and/or asleep during a test, procedure or surgery.

## How do I care for my child after anesthesia?

A member of the care team will explain the doctor's instructions.

Some guidelines to follow include:

- Until fully awake:
  - Stay with your child.
  - Place your child's head to the side if they are sleeping when you buckle them into a seat, child safety seat or stroller. This helps them breathe better.
  - Place your child on their side while sleeping. This may help prevent problems if they throw up.
  - Keep the lights, activity and noise levels low. This will help your child rest.
- Watch your child closely for the first hour after going home and then every hour for the rest of the day.
- Some children may become restless from the anesthesia. Calm and reassure your child if this happens. This should wear off within a few hours.
- Provide quiet indoor activities, such as coloring, reading or watching TV. Avoid activities that need balance and coordination, such as biking, swimming and skating, for at least 24 hours after anesthesia (or as advised by the doctor).
- Help your child climb stairs safely.
- Give your child their favorite things to help comfort them. This might include a blanket, stuffed animal or toy.



## What can I give my child to drink and eat after anesthesia?

A member of the care team will explain the doctor's instructions.

Some guidelines to follow include:

- Give your child clear liquids, such as juice, Pedialyte, Gatorade or popsicles, until they are fully awake and alert (or as their doctor instructs).

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

## After anesthesia - caring for your child, continued

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- Advance to your child's normal diet and feeding schedule when your child:
  - Is fully awake.
  - Can drink liquids without vomiting (throwing up).
- Start with foods that are low in fat and easy to digest. This might include toast, crackers, cereal, rice or mashed potatoes.

### How can I keep my child safe after anesthesia?

Your child may not have normal balance and coordination for up to 24 hours after anesthesia. Until your child returns to normal:

- Your child should not do anything where they will need strength and balance. This might include swimming, riding a bike and climbing stairs alone.
- If you have a young child, they may need help walking and going to the bathroom.
- Avoid loud activities. Encourage quiet activities instead. This might include looking at books and watching movies.

### How do I care for a child with special needs?

- For the next 24 hours:
  - Your child may need more help than normal.
  - Stay with your child when they eat and bathe.
- Help your child with their adaptive equipment, such as a wheelchair or walker.
- Your child may wake up disoriented, upset or crying. This is normal and most often passes quickly. Every child reacts differently to anesthesia and sedation.

### When should I call my child's doctor?

Call the doctor if your child:

- Keeps throwing up (throws up more than 3 times within the first 4 hours after anesthesia).
- Has a fever of 101.3°F or higher.
- Is very restless or agitated and cannot be calmed after a few hours.
- Is hard to wake up or is not fully awake after 6 hours. You should be able to wake your child. It is OK if your child goes back to sleep again after you wake them.

Call your child's doctor if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

### When should I call 911?

Call 911 **right away** if your child has signs of breathing problems. This might include:

- Fast or shallow breathing
- Labored breathing (hard to breathe)

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## **After anesthesia - caring for your child, continued**

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- Chest retractions (skin pulls in around the ribs and chest when breathing)
- A blue or dark purple color to the nails, lips or gums
- Wheezing or grunting
- Chest pain or tightness

Also call if your child is very hard to wake up.

**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.**

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