

Preparing your teen for surgery (ages 12 years and older)



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 them, on what to expect, and on how to care for them after surgery.

What are some common fears for teens?

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

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

How can I help prepare my teen for surgery?

Talk with them

- Prepare your teen by explaining the reason for surgery. Do this as soon as you decide to proceed with surgery.
- Let your teen have as much control as possible. To help them feel in control:
 - Let them help with plans for surgery.
 - Give them choices when possible.
- Have your teen make a list of questions to ask the doctors and nurses.
- Talk about fears, and tell the truth. Teens need truthful information to build trust.
- Let them know there is a doctor whose **only job** is to make sure your teen stays asleep during surgery. The doctor is called an anesthesiologist. Also let your teen know that:
 - They will not feel anything while they are asleep.
 - The doctor will stop giving anesthesia (medicine that helps them stay asleep) when the surgery is done. After this, your teen will wake up.
- Let them know that many other people, including those older and younger than them, have had the same type of surgery.
- Offer praise, positive reinforcement and support.

Choose your words

- Explain your teen's surgery in words they can understand.
- 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.
- Have your teen explain back to you what will happen to make sure they understand.

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

Preparing your teen for surgery, continued

Visit the hospital

Visit the hospital before surgery if possible. The Child Life department offers tours for children older than 3 years of age.

- A tour can help your teen learn about the hospital. It also gives them a chance to see the sights, sounds and events they will have the day of surgery.
- You and your teen will have a chance to ask questions.
- Call 404-785-8648 to schedule a tour.

Prepare for surgery

- Let your teen bring comfort items from home, such as handheld video games, books, movies or music.
- Your teen may go through many mood swings in the hospital. Be patient and understanding. Let them know that you are there for support.
 - Your teen may become withdrawn and not want to talk or answer questions. There are times when they may need to be alone.
 - Let them know it is OK to be scared and cry. They may need to know that you have the same worries they do.
- Let your teen know you will:
 - Wait close by during their surgery.
 - See them when they get to their room.
- Help your teen 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 you know about your teen's surgery and what to expect. This can help decrease your fears.
- Make sure that you, your teen and your family are well rested.
- Take care of yourself. Your teen can sense and react to your stress level.

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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