

Pain Management after Short Stay Surgery

Pain management for children and teenagers following short stay surgery, (day stay or overnight stay)

One size doesn't fit all

Every child/teenager responds slightly differently to pain after an operation.

Your child's age and type of surgery will affect the amount of pain your child may have.

Your child may need to take pain relief medicine for the first few days at home until they are moving comfortably, eating and sleeping well.

It is always easier to 'stay on top' of pain by giving pain relief medicine regularly rather than waiting until the pain is bad before giving medicine.

It is often hard to know if young children have pain. Sometimes, because they have been in hospital, they may be more 'clingy' and need extra attention and comfort such as cuddles.

Signs that your child may need pain relief medicine include crying, grizzling, not wanting to move or not sleeping well. Not wanting to swallow after mouth or throat surgery also shows the need for pain relief medicine.

Some children may vomit after leaving hospital and so have difficulty taking pain medicine. Contact your doctor if your child has 3 or more vomits.

Older children and teenagers may have more pain than younger children and so need more pain relief medicine.

Expected length of pain

This may vary between children.

Tonsillectomy: 7 - 10 days

Uncomplicated appendicectomy: 5 - 7 days

**Adenoidectomy/
nasal surgery:** 2 days

**Hernia repair/
orchidopexy:** 2 days

Circumcision: up to 5 days (depending on the age of the child)

Hypospadias repair: 2 - 7 days (depending on how big the surgery was)

**Squint repair/
eye surgery:** 2 - 4 days

Orthopaedic surgery:

- Simple fracture: 2 - 4 days
- Arthroscopy/knee surgery - tendon release: 5 - 10 days

Plastic surgery: 2 - 4 days

Dental: 2 - 4 days

Pain relief medicine choices

Before you take your child home the nurse and/or doctor will talk to you about what pain relief medicine to give your child.

Do NOT give your child medicines that contain codeine, even those you can buy without a prescription.

Non-prescription medicines

Paracetamol (e.g. Panadol®): This is the first choice for pain relief and can be given every 4 to 6 hours however no more than four times a day. Example of times to give regular paracetamol (four times a day) is 7am, 12noon, 5pm and 10pm.

Caution – paracetamol mixture comes in different strengths. Please check the label for the correct dose to use for your child.

Caution – do not give more than a total of four doses in 24 hours of paracetamol or other medicines which contain paracetamol.

Ibuprofen (e.g. Nurofen®): Not only relieves pain but also reduces swelling. It can be a useful extra medicine when regular paracetamol alone is not giving enough pain relief. Ibuprofen can be given even when your child has had paracetamol. Always give with milk or food. A dose may be given every 6 to 8 hours. Example of times to give regular ibuprofen (three times a day) is 8am, 2pm and 10pm.

Caution – Ibuprofen is not suitable for everyone, please read the label carefully or check with your pharmacist or doctor.

Recommended pain relief medicine for your child to have at home

Read your Surgical Ward Patient Discharge Information Sheet to see the last time your child had pain relief medicine in hospital.

Following tonsillectomy

Give your child paracetamol four times a day for at least six days. This should be given regularly and not just when they have pain. After this time, paracetamol can be given when needed.

Following uncomplicated appendicectomy

Give your child regular paracetamol four times a day for another 48 hours after leaving hospital and then just when needed. If your child is still not moving comfortably or sleeping well, give ibuprofen up to three times a day as your child needs.

Following other short stay surgery

Give your child regular paracetamol four times a day for a further 24 hours after leaving hospital and then just when needed. If your child is still not moving comfortably or sleeping well, give ibuprofen (up to three times a day) as your child needs.

When to contact your child's doctor

Your child is still having pain after taking the pain relief medicine your child's nurse or doctor has suggested.

Your child's pain comes back or gets worse after it had started to get better.

You may like to keep a record of the pain relief medicine you give your child at home.

Adapted from

Circumcision, Women's and Children's Hospital: Adelaide

For more information

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