

# Children attending surgery

Information for parents and/or caregivers

---

## How to prepare your child for a hospital visit

A child's visit to hospital does not need to be a negative experience. Preparing your child in advance about what to expect in hospital, can help reduce anxiety about what will happen to them during their stay. This may make the child feel more comfortable about the procedure and with the staff caring for them during your child's stay.

## Tips to help prepare your child:

### Preschool age:

- Talk to them about the hospital visit one to three days before, use simple words they will understand to explain why they are coming to hospital and what will happen. If attending pre-admission you and your child will be shown around the ward and possibly receive a gift bag with a trauma doll. You can use this visit and the doll to help explain where they are coming and why, and show them it is not a threatening environment. Ensure they bring a teddy, blanket or toy they use for comfort to take to theatre with them, the nurse upon admission can put a name tag on it so it doesn't get lost and it gives the child a familiar object to wake up with until they can return to you.

### School age

- Prepare your child a week before. Ask your child if they have any questions or worries. It is important that you give them honest answers. You may be tempted to tell your child things that aren't true to reassure them, but if you know that something will hurt or be unpleasant, tell them and help your child come up with strategies that will help them through it, e.g. deep breathing or thinking of a pleasant story in their head.
- Playing 'doctors and nurses' can also help prepare them for hospital, and some of the things that may happen. Using a teddy or doll for younger school age children can help them understand better.
- Emphasise that the hospital visit is only temporary.
- Let your child help with packing their bag for hospital. They can choose what pyjamas or clothes they would like to bring and what favourite toy or book.
- Reading a story book together about a hospital visit will give them an idea of what to expect and may help them see the hospital visit as an adventure. (these can be found at your local library or online)
- Talk about the positive points of their hospital visit – the school room with toys they can play with, the icecream, ice blocks and jelly they can have after their operation, and the televisions at each bed.

## Teenager

- If your child is a teenager you can explain in more detail about what is going to happen during their hospital stay. Encourage them to ask questions, talk about their feelings and participate in decision-making. Teenagers are very independent and body-conscious so respect your child's need for privacy but also remember that they may be too embarrassed to say that they need you or that they don't understand what is happening.

## Pre Admission Clinic

A pre admission phone call is booked for most children prior to their surgical date, however at times we may decide the best pathway for you and your child is to come along to the pre admission clinic, on the ground floor. During this appointment you and your child will meet with anaesthetist, a surgical doctor and a registered nurse. You will be able to ask any questions that you may have during this appointment.

If a pre admission phone call is booked, the nurse will go through the health questionnaire, current medications and address and concerns that you may have. The nurse will email you some information, if you have not received it in the post. If your child is currently taking medications, the pre operative management of the medication will be discussed over the phone, after review by a medical officer. Sometimes we may book an anaesthetic phone call review; to discuss the anaesthetic and obtain anaesthetic consent on the phone, as well as the nurse call. If you wish to speak with an anaesthetist prior to your surgical date and this was not booked on the same day as the nurse call, this can be arranged at the time of the nurse call.

## What will happen on the day?

Once you have booked in at "Admissions" on Level 2 you will be sent up to the Paediatric Unit (4E).

Please be aware that limited space is available. If you have younger children, you will need to arrange child care for the day. We allow a maximum of one carer per child. If your child is admitted to 4E, visitors are welcome during visiting hours.

Here your child's nurse will introduce themselves, show you around if you haven't been shown before and ask you some questions to make sure your child is ready for their operation. There may be quite a wait for it to be your child's turn to have their operation, so come prepared for this!

We suggest that children bring a book, some music and headphones or a computer game to help keep them

entertained. Laptops/iPad's etc. can be brought in from home; however it is your responsibility to keep your belongings safe. Please ask staff for assistance if needed.

## Operation time

Once it is your child's turn for theatre, we will ask them to go to the toilet and put on a hospital gown.

A Patient Service Assistant (PSA) from theatre will come to collect you and your child to escort you to theatre. Please be aware that even if both parents come into hospital, only one parent can accompany your child to theatre. If you are accompanying your child to theatre you must wear closed in shoes.

In most situations it will be possible for you to be able to stay with your child for the start of the anaesthetic, the anaesthetist will discuss this with you at the pre admission clinic or on the morning of your child's surgery.

You will be asked to put on a hat, shoe covers and a gown before following the doctors into the operation room.

The anaesthetic medication can be given two different ways – the doctor might put a 'drip'(IV Cannula) in your child's arm and give the medicine through the drip, or the medicine might be given through a mask on your child's face. The doctor will discuss this with you beforehand, together a method is decided based on your child's age and what is best for your child.

It is important for parents to know that when a child has an anaesthetic, as well as becoming drowsy it is also normal for your child to become floppy, for your child's eyes to roll back and for them to have noisy breathing when they go to sleep.

Once your child is asleep a nurse will show you out of the room and explain how to get back to the ward.

Please feel free to take some time out, have a break and a cup of coffee/tea before coming back to the ward to wait for your child. A parent's room is available on the ward with coffee/tea facilities.

## After your child's operation

Your child will wake up in "Recovery" with specialised nurses looking after them. For safety reasons, parents are not allowed into Recovery, so you will meet your child again when the Recovery nurses bring them back to the ward, as soon as they safely can.

Occasionally if your child is really distressed you may be called to attend to them in Recovery. It is normal for babies and young children to be crying or upset when they come back from Recovery; this can be from a mixture of fear, pain, post anaesthetic reaction, or hunger. Children usually calm down once they have a cuddle from Mum or Dad and have a drink, a small sleep can also help. It is not uncommon to feel sick after an anaesthetic so it is important that your child starts drinking slowly.

If they are feeling okay a little while after having a drink then they can slowly start to eat when they first come back from the operation.

If your child has had day surgery, you will be required to stay on the ward for usually no more than 2 hours, depending on how your child wakes up from the procedure. This is to make sure that your child wakes up properly, is eating and drinking without feeling sick and that their pain is treated. Occasionally your child may have to be admitted to the ward overnight after having surgery. It is advisable to pack a small bag with pyjamas and toiletries just in case.

If your child needs to stay overnight after their operation, their doctor will come to see them the next morning before sending them home.

## Why does your child need to fast before their operation?

We understand that babies and children can become very upset when they are hungry or thirsty, but it is very important that you follow the fasting instructions you have been given for your child. If your child has food or extra fluid in their stomach when they are given the anaesthetic, there is a risk that they will vomit and then breathe this vomit into their lungs. This is a very dangerous situation.

**Please Note: If your child has not fasted correctly their operation will need to be delayed or even cancelled for their own safety.**

## What is an anaesthetic?

A general anaesthetic is a medicine that puts your child into a deep, controlled sleep. It is one doctor's job to look after your child while they are asleep while the other doctors perform the operation. During this sleep your child will not be aware of what is happening and will not feel pain.

How to help your child when they have an anaesthetic

While the experience of your child having an anaesthetic will probably be daunting and scary for you as a parent, it is important for you to remember that you are the best person to help your child have a calm and positive anaesthetic experience.

If you are upset, they will be upset too! Some strategies that can help your child stay calm while the doctors are giving them the anaesthetic medicines are:

- Singing to them
- Asking your child questions about things they like
- Reminding them of the relaxation/coping strategies you practised at home
- Holding their hand

If you feel that it may be difficult for you to stay calm while your child is having the anaesthetic, it might help you to bring a support person along on the day. You can practise the relaxation techniques (just like your child) that can be useful for you also.

It may help to send someone else (your partner or the child's grandparent) in with your child instead.

Once your child is asleep, it is perfectly normal to become upset! Feel free to talk to your child's nurse about your fears and worries and how you found the experience.

## Further Resources to Help You

[www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/psurg/paed surg/index.html](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/psurg/paed surg/index.html)

The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Sydney, website  
[www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au)

Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare  
[www.awch.org.au/parents-carers.php](http://www.awch.org.au/parents-carers.php)

Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, website  
[www.rch.org.au](http://www.rch.org.au)

---

## For more information

Paediatric Unit  
Women's and Children's Division  
Flinders Medical Centre  
Flinders Drive  
Bedford Park SA 5042  
Telephone: 08 8204 5511  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)



Interpreter



<https://creativecommons.org>



This document has been reviewed  
and endorsed by consumers.

If you require this information in  
an alternative language or format  
please contact SA Health on the  
details provided and they will  
make every effort to assist you.