

# Care After Lower Extremity Orthopedic Surgery

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## What can my child eat after surgery?

After surgery, when your child is being taken care of in the hospital, we will check if your child is ready to begin eating. Their stomach needs to “be awake” to begin eating. They should start with clear liquids and then move onto something bland like toast or crackers. When your child can handle bland foods, they can move onto a full liquid diet. If your child is having day surgery, it is OK for your child to have something light to eat when they are hungry. Examples of foods that are OK are clear liquids, toast, crackers, yogurt, soup and fruit. If food stays down, then your child may eat what they usually eat. It is important to drink plenty of liquids.

## How do I help manage my child's pain?

Pain and discomfort are normal after surgery. You know your child best. We encourage you to take an active part in your child's recovery. Please talk with your child's care team about how your child shows that they are hurting. In addition to medicine prescribed for pain, encourage coping tools, like books and games, to treat pain and provide support. Pain gets better for most children after the first few days.

Refer to our handouts, “Pain Medicine after Outpatient Surgery” [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1251.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1251.pdf) and “Acute Pain” [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf) for more information.

Use our “Pain Medicine Log” [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1453.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1453.pdf) to keep track of the pain medicine you have given your child.

It is helpful to take pain medication prior to physical therapy.

## Swelling

Your child may have swelling around the incision (area where we cut for surgery). Swelling causes more pressure around the incision and increases pain. To ease pain and swelling, raise the incision area above the heart.

## When can my child get wet?

Keep the bandages (dressing) completely dry for \_\_\_\_ days. A shower is OK if the incisions are dry. Your child should avoid soaking the incision under water. No bath, hot tub, or swimming until instructed.

## How should I take care of my child's incision?

Your child's healthcare team will check the box next to the steps you should follow.

- Leave the cut (incision) alone until you follow up in the clinic.

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### To Learn More

- Orthopedics Clinic Department  
206-987-2109 weekdays during business hours
- Seattle Children's Operator  
206-987-2000 evenings and weekends
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



### After showering for the first time:

- Leave the cut open to air.
- Cover the cut with gauze.
- Cover the cut with Band-Aids.
- Do not put ointments on the cut.
- Steri-Strips over the cut
  - Steri-Strips are thin pieces of tape that are on top of the dissolvable stitches that were placed under the skin.
  - Leave Steri-Strips on until they fall off on their own.
- Cut (incision) is closed with skin glue (Dermabond)
  - Keep the skin clean with soap and water.
  - The glue will flake off on its own after about a week.
- Follow the “Cast Care” PE002 guidelines that will be given to you.

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### Important points about your child’s cast:

- Your child should not put anything down the cast to scratch their skin. Hurting the skin can cause an infection.
- It is normal for the skin under the cast to become itchy. Distracting your child is helpful.
- A blow dryer on low will help get fresh air to flow under the cast.
- A vacuum cleaner hose can be run over the cast to help circulate fresh air.
- They should keep it dry.
- It is okay to decorate it but do not cover the cast completely with anything other than markers as it makes it harder for fresh air to circulate through the cast.

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### How active can my child be?

It is best to listen to your child about what feels OK. Your child will tend to limit their own activity if they feel uncomfortable.

Your child’s activity level will depend on the type of surgery they had.

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### Follow the instructions checked below:

#### Equipment:

- Your child may have physical therapy after surgery or after their initial recovery time. This will be at Seattle Children’s, one of the satellite clinics or closer to home.
- Your child has a leg brace.

It may be removed for therapy exercises and bathing, otherwise it needs to be on. Do not adjust the settings. It needs to stay on until your child is seen in clinic.

### Activity:

- Your child may put as much weight on the leg as they can. Use crutches if needed. Your child should walk while being supported by crutches.
- Your child may only put toe-touch weight-bear on the \_\_\_\_\_ lower extremity. Use crutches for help.
- Your child may not put any weight on the \_\_\_\_\_ leg.
- Your child may not put any weight on either leg.
- Use crutches.
- Use a walker.
- Use a wheelchair with a way to elevate the leg.  
If your child is too small for a wheelchair, you can use a wagon.
- Use a wheelchair with a way to elevate both legs.
- Your child needs to be reclined to \_\_\_\_\_ degrees and will need a reclining wheelchair with a way to elevate the \_\_\_\_\_ leg(s).  
To note: reclining wheelchairs are harder to transport because they are bigger and bulkier.

All casts, splints, braces, crutches, abduction pillows, etc., are to be worn as instructed. Follow the rules that were given to you.

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### When can my child go back to school, work or drive a car?

Most children will stay home a few days to several weeks. This gives them time to recover from the procedure and from anesthesia. It is OK for your child to return to school when they are comfortable and when they are no longer taking strong pain medicine, like oxycodone. Arrangements with the school may be needed for their safe return to school. The school may need written instructions for their return.

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### Things to consider:

- **How will they get around school?** If the school is more than one level, can they get an elevator key? Can a friend help with books and/or transport between classes?
- **Will they need any medicines at school?** If so, the school will need a medicine authorization from your child's doctor or a licensed medical provider on your child's care team.
- **If your child drives a car:** They should not drive for the first 72 hours after surgery or while they are taking prescribed pain medicine. They should not drive if they shouldn't/cannot bear any weight to either leg and/or in a cast. It is OK to drive if they are only taking mild pain medicine, like Tylenol or Advil.
- **Some children will need to be excused from PE, sports and rough play.** Please check with your surgeon to see which activities are OK for your child or if they need to wait.

### When should I call my child's healthcare team?

Please call us if your child has any of these warning signs:

- Fever of 101.5° F or higher
- Redness (or shade darker than normal) on the skin spreading from the incision area
- New bleeding, oozing blood or pus under the bandage dressing or at the incision
- Very bad or constant pain, or pain that gets worse, even after giving pain medicine as directed and on time.
- Vomits (throws up) more than once
- Chest pain/shortness of breath

Call the Orthopedics Clinic at 206-987-2109 during weekday business hours. On evenings and weekends, call the operator at Seattle Children's at 206-987-2000. Ask the operator to page the orthopedic resident on call.

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### When will my child need to be seen again?

Your child is scheduled for a follow-up appointment on:

Radiology

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Orthopedics

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Orthotics

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Physical Therapy

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Please call the Orthopedics Clinic to confirm your appointment time.

Your child will be seen at the following location:

- Seattle Children's Main Campus  
4800 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105  
Level 6, Ocean zone entrance
  - Bellevue Clinic  
1500 116 Ave. NE, Bellevue, WA 98004
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### Other helpful handouts

Pain Medicine after Outpatient Surgery  
[seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1251.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1251.pdf)

Acute Pain  
[seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf)

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