

Neurosurgery

Care After Your Child's Surgery

How to take care of the incision and protect your child's head, when to return to activities, when to call us and who to call if you have concerns.

How do I take care of the incision?

Most of the time, we close your child's surgery site (incision) with stitches that dissolve on their own about 1 month after the surgery.

- Gently wash your child's incision daily with soap and water until it is completely healed to a scar. Pat the incision dry with a clean towel.
 - Do not let the wound go under water (bath, pool, hot tub or lake) until the surgical incision looks like a well-healed scar.
 - Do not put any dressings or ointments on the incision unless directed by your care team.
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How do I protect my child's head?

- Protect the incision from hard bumps, sharp objects and sunburn, as usual.
 - Your child may lie in any position. Encourage your child to change position frequently while awake (at least every 2 hours).
 - You may choose to sit your child in a car seat, highchair or other seat to help reduce swelling of the face and head. This can be done 3 to 4 times a day for an hour or more if your child is comfortable.
 - Your child should keep their feet on the ground and avoid contact activities (no bikes, skateboards, climbing, swings, etc.) until they have their post-surgery appointment 2-3 months after surgery.
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When can my child return to day care and other normal activities?

It is OK to return to school, day care or other normal activities when your child:

- Is eating and sleeping fairly well
 - Has no fever
 - Feels ready
 - No longer needs strong pain medication, such as oxycodone or hydromorphone
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To Learn More

- Neurosurgery Clinic
206-987-2544
 - Option 1: Scheduling
 - Option 2: Surgery Coordinator
 - Option 4: Nurses
- Hospital operator
206-987-2000
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- 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.



Will my child need pain medicine at home?

Your child may have some pain at home. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) are often used for pain. Check with your healthcare provider before giving any type of medicine to your child.

Most children will also get a prescription medicine to use if the pain is moderate or severe. Use this along with Tylenol or Motrin as needed until the pain decreases.

Refer to these Seattle Children's handouts:

- Acute Pain
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) Dosage Table
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1305.pdf
- Ibuprofen (Motrin) Dosage Table
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1306.pdf
- Pain Medicine After Surgery
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1251.pdf

When should I call the clinic?

Call if your child has any of these signs:

- Fever of 101.5° F (38.6° C) or higher
- Less awake or alert than normal
- Swelling around the incision that is new or worsening
- Change in skin color around the incision. Depending on skin tone this could be red, purple or dark brown
- The skin around the incision is warm to the touch
- Edges of the incision split apart, or fluid leaks out
- Pain that is not helped by medicine
- Not eating or drinking well, vomiting

Constipation after surgery

The pain medicine given to your child after surgery can cause constipation. Each child is different, but a child can be considered constipated if they do not have at least one bowel movement each day. To prevent this problem, try these suggestions:

- Give your child plenty of liquids to drink. Juice and water are both good choices. Water has no calories, so it is a good choice. Apple, prune and grape juices help some children.
- Have your child eat lots of fruits and vegetables. High-fiber fruits such as cherries, prunes, pears and raisins are great. Some high-fiber vegetables are beans, peas, celery and broccoli.
- Increase bran. Foods such as graham crackers, granola, bran muffins and shredded wheat are high in bran. Older children may have popcorn. Fibercon cookies are another great source of bran and are found at some drug stores.
- Offer sugar-free or diet gummy bear candies, which contain sweeteners like sorbitol and maltitol that are not absorbed in the body. Sugar-free or diet gummy bears act like a laxative for children. Only sugar-free and diet gummy bears work in this way, not regular gummy bears.
- Have your child get moving as soon as they can. Activity like getting out of bed and walking can help get their bowels moving.

Stool Softeners

The diet changes above often help with constipation.

We may prescribe stool softeners for your child following surgery. Please ask the doctor to prescribe a stool softener before leaving the hospital if your child has a problem with constipation. Remember that your child will need to drink lots of liquids for the stool softener to work.

You can also treat constipation with glycerin suppositories found at most drug stores.

When do I come back for a follow-up appointment?

You will have a visit with a neurosurgery nurse practitioner 2 weeks after surgery to ensure the incision is healing well. If you are not local to Seattle, it might be ok to do this visit with your child's primary care doctor.

After that, you will likely have an appointment with the surgeon 2-3 months after surgery. At that visit, you can discuss if your child can return to normal activities or if more activity restrictions are needed.

Who do I call when I have a question?

Call the Neurosurgery nurses at 206-987-2544, option 4 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. During evenings, weekends and holidays, call the hospital operator at 206-987-2000 and ask to speak to the neurosurgery provider on call.
