

# Managing Your Child's Pain after a Same-Day Procedure

INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES



If your child has had an injury or a medical procedure that does not require an overnight stay in the hospital, he may be ready to go home before all the pain is gone. While you're in the hospital, healthcare providers will play a big role in controlling his pain. When you go home, **there's a lot you can do** to help your child feel better.



## What is a pain management goal?

Successful pain management may not take away all of your child's pain. The goal is to reduce or control the pain enough that your child can rest and can do the activities that will help him recover. While you're in the hospital, healthcare providers will manage your child's pain by assessing these things:

- 1 Your child's pain.** If your child can talk, he can say how he's feeling. His behavior can also show signs of pain. Using this information, healthcare providers will create a "pain score." They will adjust pain medications to try to keep the pain controlled.
- 2 Your child's comfort.** Comfort includes staying warm, not being anxious, and not throwing up. Being comfortable can help his overall pain management.
- 3 Your child's recovery activities.** There are certain things your child needs to be able to do to get better. These can include walking, crawling, coughing, breathing deeply, eating, or sleeping better. His pain should be controlled enough that he can do them.

## How will my child respond to pain?

Being in pain can affect your child's behavior. These are some common and normal responses to pain:

- **Increased demand for attention** and increased crying. This can include returning to the behaviors of a younger child.
- **Sleep difficulties.** Your child may be afraid to sleep alone, be more afraid of the dark, or have nightmares or night terrors.
- **Anxiety.** Your child may be watching out for something painful or scary to happen. He may distrust people he doesn't know, especially healthcare workers.
- **Nervous behaviors** such as scratching, picking, or nail biting.
- **Anger.** Your child may get angry about things that normally don't bother him.
- **Concern about his body** and more fear or curiosity about death.
- **Appetite and activities.** Your child may not want to eat, drink, play with toys, or move around.

## Before you leave the hospital

Before you leave, talk with your child's healthcare providers about how you can help manage the pain at home. These are some questions to ask:

- **What kind of pain should we expect?** Should it go away soon, or last a long time? Should it get worse before it gets better? How will it change?
- **What are the risks, benefits, and side effects of my child's pain medications?** How can we tell the difference between side effects of the medication and complications of the procedure?
- **What activities does my child need to be able to do to recover?** Should I encourage him to crawl, walk, breathe deeply, drink water?
- **Who should I call if I have questions or concerns?** Should I call my family doctor or the hospital? Where should I call if we have a problem at night or on the weekend?



## When you get home

Just being at home can help your child feel more comfortable and relaxed. But **it's still important to treat the pain.** You can care for your child using the same three goals your child's healthcare providers used in the hospital: managing the pain, keeping your child comfortable, and helping your child do recovery activities. Here are some ideas to help you take care of your child at home:

### 1 Manage the pain

- **Give medications just as the doctor recommends.** This will help keep the pain from becoming severe, and make it easier to manage. If taken as directed, there is very little risk of addiction; don't give your child medication more frequently than recommended. Eventually the pain will decrease and you can wait longer between doses.
- **Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving your child Tylenol (acetaminophen) or anything that contains it.** You may be sent home with medication that already includes Tylenol. If you give more, you could accidentally give too much.
- **Look for signs that your child is in pain.** Pulling her legs toward her chest, a worried face, sweating, and an increased heart rate can all be signs of pain. If your child says she is in pain, it's safer to treat it right away than to wait.
- **Apply cold or heat.** Cold packs can reduce swelling and help with short-term pain. Warmth can soothe aching muscles and stiff joints. Ask your healthcare providers how to use cold and heat for pain relief.

### 2 Keep your child comfortable

- **Treat nausea.** Some pain medications cause nausea and vomiting. Ask your healthcare providers how to introduce foods in a way that eases nausea.
- **Treat constipation.** Some medications cause constipation. Encourage your child to drink fluids and eat high-fiber foods such as whole-grain bread.
- **Help your child with the things that normally keep her comfortable.** Make sure she stays warm. If she likes to suck her thumb or a pacifier, or comfort herself in some other way, try to control the pain enough that doing so doesn't hurt.

### 3 Help your child do recovery activities

- **Help your child do the activities that will help her recover.** Your healthcare providers can tell you what they are.

In addition to her specific recovery activities, these activities may also help:

- **Help your child think about something else.** Play her favorite music. Sing to her or have her sing. Let her play with a handheld electronic game or your family pet.
- **Touch your child.** Rubbing her back, arms, legs, or feet may take her mind off the pain.
- **Help your child relax.** Ask your provider about deep breathing and relaxation exercises.

#### What should I report to my doctor?

Once you're home, your child should be starting to feel better. If she doesn't, or if you see new symptoms, there may be something happening that your doctor needs to know about. **Call your doctor or nurse if your child:**

- Has pain that does not get better
- Has a fever over 101° F (38.4° C)
- Is dizzy, light-headed, fainting
- Is too sleepy
- Is not making sense when she talks
- Is vomiting a lot
- Itches
- Has trouble urinating (peeing) or is constipated
- Has redness or swelling around an incision or catheter
- Has any other symptoms that worry you

**Never share medication prescribed for your child with anyone else.** For instructions on safe disposal of unused medication, visit [www.medicationsdisposal.utah.gov](http://www.medicationsdisposal.utah.gov).

