

Let's Talk About...

Surgery: After care

After surgery, it's common for your child to feel sick or to have a fever, become constipated or dehydrated, or move more slowly at first. Read on for tips on caring for your child after surgery.

What should I do when taking my child home?

Watch your child carefully while you drive them home. If your child is sleepy, their head may flop down and obstruct their airway, making it hard to breathe. Your child may also be sleepy when they get home. Check on infants throughout the day to make sure they're breathing normally while sleeping.

What should I do about nausea and vomiting?

After surgery, many children feel nauseated and may vomit in the first 24 hours. This can be caused by medicines during surgery, car movement, or pain medicine after surgery. Help control nausea by:

- Encouraging your child to lie still
- Offering clear liquids, which are important after surgery to help prevent dehydration
- Slowly offering regular foods over a few days until your child can eat a normal diet

If your child vomits, let their stomach settle for 30–60 minutes and offer clear liquids. If your child vomits for several hours, call their healthcare provider for instructions. It may take 1–2 days before your child is interested in solid foods.



When can my child eat after surgery?

After your child wakes up from surgery, they may have clear liquids like Pedialyte™, water, apple juice, sports drinks, ice pops, and plain gelatin. These are easy to digest. Most babies can take a bottle or breastfeed. Your child may eat a normal diet after leaving the hospital, but start with soft, easily digested foods. Avoid high-fat or greasy foods, like hamburgers and pizza, the first 24 hours after surgery. It's best to feed your child at home rather than at a restaurant while they are recovering.

When can my child bathe or shower?

Your child can usually wash with a washcloth the first day or night as long as they don't get the bandage wet. Do not submerge the surgery site in water. Follow your child's healthcare provider's instructions and ask when your child can bathe again.

Younger children	Older children
Water	Popsicle
Apple juice mixed with water	Drinks with electrolytes, (such as Gatorade®)
Drinks with electrolytes, (such as Pedialyte®)	Clear soda (such as 7-Up®)

What is a normal amount of drainage from the bandage?

Some bandages will fill with blood but should be able to hold without leaking. Call your child's healthcare provider if:

- You have blood on your hand when touching the bandage. You shouldn't remove the bandage but may need to add a second bandage on top of the soiled one.
- Blood is getting on your child's clothes or sheets
- Your child had throat surgery and starts to bleed. If your child is old enough to gargle without choking, have them gargle with ice water while you call.
- You see bright-red bleeding. Hold pressure over the surgery site like you would for a nosebleed while calling.

When should I change my child's bandage?

Follow your child's healthcare provider's instructions about changing the bandage. To protect your child:

- Wash your hands before and after touching the bandage.
- Keep the bandage dry.
- Cover the bandage with clothing, towels, or bibs when your child eats or drinks to protect it.
- Change bandages in the diaper area if they become soiled with urine.

What activities should my child avoid after surgery?

Anesthesia medicine can affect balance, so don't let your child do any activities that require balance the first day after surgery. This includes:

- Riding a bike or scooter
- Playing on playground equipment
- Climbing a ladder
- Rollerblading, skateboarding, or snowboarding
- Riding on or driving an ATV (they should also avoid this while taking strong pain medicine)

Follow your child's surgeon's directions about other activities your child should avoid.

Once your child's coordination returns, they can return to their normal activities.

Sometimes your child's healthcare provider can suggest when your child can return to school. Ask your child whether they're ready, but do not rush them. If your child can't go to a full day of school, let them go as long as they can. Then gradually increase the time until they can attend all day.

What is normal behavior after surgery?

It is normal for your child's behavior to change after surgery. They may:

- Act like a younger child (bed wetting or acting out)
- Change sleep and eating patterns
- Have nightmares

If this happens, be patient with your child. Most behavior changes last a few days to 2 weeks. Remember that your child's routine was upset by surgery and comfort them. If the behavior lasts longer than 4 weeks, call your child's doctor.

What if my child has a fever?

It is normal for your child to have a low fever in the first 24 hours. To reduce the fever:

- Encourage your child to drink lots of fluids
- Give your child acetaminophen (Ah-seat-uh-MEN-oh-fen, commonly called Tylenol®)

Look at medicine labels carefully, because some pain medicines contain acetaminophen. Don't give your child more acetaminophen without calling their healthcare provider first. If your child's temperature rises above 101°F, call their healthcare provider.

How do I help my child manage pain?

To help your child manage pain, comfort them and listen to their concerns. Make your child as comfortable as possible to encourage healing. Talk to an older child about pain levels, and watch for signs of pain in a younger or developmentally delayed child. A child in pain may moan, whimper, make a face of pain, cry, be irritable, be inactive, not eat, or not sleep.

