Let's Talk About...

Surgery: What Happens During the Procedure?

Why shouldn't my child eat or drink before surgery?

To keep your child safe, he must not eat or drink for several hours before surgery. Anesthesia, the medicine that helps your child sleep during surgery, also causes the stomach to relax. When the stomach is relaxed, whatever is in the stomach can come up and cause your child to choke or possibly have stomach contents go into his lungs. To keep your child as safe as possible, the doctors and nurses will tell you when to stop feeding your child before his surgery. If your child eats or drinks within a short time before surgery, the surgery will have to be delayed or cancelled.

How long will I wait before my child goes into surgery?

Your child will be scheduled for a surgery time. This time will be close to when your child will go to surgery, but you may need to wait longer. There are many reasons that affect how long you'll have to wait for your child's surgery.

- Infants and small children are often scheduled earlier in the day.
- Surgeries may take longer than expected.
- Children may need more tests after they arrive at the hospital.
- Emergency surgeries may need to happen before scheduled surgeries. If it is 20 minutes past the scheduled time, please come to the nurses' desk in the waiting area. You can get information about your child's surgery there. They are happy to update you.

Will I see the doctors before surgery?

You will speak with your surgeon and anesthesiologist before your child is taken to surgery. Your surgeon will review your child's medical history, explain your child's surgery, and ask you to sign a consent for surgery. This is a time to discuss any questions or concerns you may have. Your anesthesiologist will talk to you about the method of going to sleep that is safest for your child.

What happens to my child in surgery?

When it is time for the surgery, the anesthesiologist will carry your infant or toddler to the operating room (OR). If your child is preschool age or older, he can choose to go to the OR in a wagon, a wheelchair, a tricycle, or by walking with the anesthesiologist.

Once in the OR, the nurses will cover him with a warm blanket. The anesthesiologist will then help your child fall asleep with medicine called anesthesia. The doctor may give anesthesia medicine with a mask or into the veins. If the doctor gives your child medicine with a mask, your child can choose a scent such as root beer, grape, or bubblegum to smell through the mask. Your child will drift off to sleep in about one minute.

The anesthesiologist may decide, because of your child's age or medical condition, that it is safest to give the medicine into a vein. To do this, the doctor will place an IV. An IV is a tiny, flexible tube inserted into a vein. The doctor will use it to give your child fluid or medicines before, during, and after your child's surgery. Once your child receives the medicine, he will drift off to sleep in about a minute.

Where do I wait during the operation?

During your child's surgery, you can wait in the parent waiting room. While your child is in surgery please tell the receptionist if you want to leave the waiting room for any reason. This will help the staff find you, if necessary. If the surgery is longer than two hours, an operating room nurse will update you periodically. Please do not leave the hospital while your child is in surgery. The surgeon will talk to you in the waiting room after your child's surgery. We will reunite you with your child as soon as possible.

How will my child feel when he wakes up?

As your child wakes up after surgery, he may be confused, pale, restless, and unsteady. He may be irritable and fussy or even cry hard for a while. These are all normal reactions to anesthesia. Other common reactions are nausea and vomiting, hoarse voice, sore throat, or coughing. These are temporary and should go away a short time after surgery.

Will my child have an IV?

Your child may receive an IV before or after he is asleep but before the surgery. Let the surgery staff know if your child sucks his thumb and the IV can be placed in another area. An IV allows the doctor to give fluids and medicines during the surgery. The IV is left in place after the surgery until it is time to go home.

When can I take my child home?

You can take your child home when he is fully awake and breathing normally. He should be drinking clear liquids without vomiting. We want his pain to be under control and be as comfortable as possible. Most importantly, we want you to feel comfortable taking him home.

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