Preparing the Infant for Surgery

What part about surgery is most stressful for an infant?

Infants are too young to benefit from preoperative planning, education, and explanations. However, recognizing what is stressful to infants can guide you in planning for your baby's surgery. Things that are stressful to infants in the hospital may include the following:

- separation from parents
- having many different caregivers
- seeing strange sights, sounds, and smells
- new and different routines
- interrupted sleep
- day and night confusion

How do I prepare my infant for surgery?

- It is important to keep your baby's routine the same before the day of surgery.
- Make sure you, your baby, and your family are well rested.
- Bring your baby's favorite security item and perhaps some soothing music to the hospital. This will help create a more familiar environment for your baby. You may make a tape of your voice reading or singing for the nursing staff to play when you are not there.
- Let the nursing staff know what your baby's usual schedule is, including sleep patterns and feeding habits.
- Make plans for at least one parent to be with your baby as much as possible so that he/she will have familiar touch, voice, and smile.
- The most important part about preparing your infant for surgery is for you to try to remain calm. Your baby will sense if you are frightened or stressed. Be well informed about what to expect on the day of surgery and ask questions to alleviate any fears you might have. Relaxed, nonverbal communication, such as voice, facial expressions, gestures, and body language can give positive assurance to your baby.
- Be patient with your baby. It is normal for him/her to cry and be fussy during this stressful time. He/she may be very clingy and become hard to comfort and console. Give a lot of love and let your baby know that you will be nearby.
- The brief period before surgery when the baby cannot eat or drink can be difficult. Plan to distract, rock, walk, and comfort him/her during this time.
- Remember, too, to take care of yourself. Simplify your life during this time and do not be afraid to ask for help from family and friends. Remaining positive and calm can help reduce your baby's anxiety.

From University Health Care: [www.shmcchildren.org](http://www.shmcchildren.org)
Preparing the Toddler for Surgery

What part about surgery is most stressful for a toddler?

Toddlers can certainly benefit from preoperative planning, education, and explanations. This preparation should take place a day or two before surgery since preparation too far in advance can produce more anxiety. Recognizing what is stressful to your toddler while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- being left alone
- having to stay in a strange bed or room
- loss of comforts of home, family, and possessions
- being in contact with unfamiliar people
- painful procedures
- medical equipment that looks and sounds scary
- feeling helpless

How do I prepare my toddler for surgery?

Ways to prepare:

- Read books to your toddler about going to the hospital.
- Interactive play with dolls and stuffed animals can help your child be more secure in the hospital environment. The child life department in your hospital can provide this service directly or provide guidance to parents preparing their children at home.
- Give very simple explanations and be careful of the words you use. For example, say, "The doctor is going to fix your arm." Do not say, "The doctor is going to make a cut on your arm."
- Let your child decide which security item he/she wants to bring to the hospital. Include a favorite book and soothing music.
- Stay with your child during hospitalization - your touch and voice will comfort him/her more than anything else. Let the nurses know about your child's usual schedule and his/her likes and dislikes.
- Be patient with your child. It is normal for toddlers to cry and be fussy during this stressful time. Your child may be very clingy and become hard to comfort and console. It is not unusual for your child to regress and have angry outbursts and tantrums. Give a lot of love and let your child know that you will be nearby.
- Remember, too, to take care of yourself. Simplify your life during this time and do not be afraid to ask for help from family and friends. Remaining positive and calm can help reduce your toddler's anxiety.

From University Health Care: [www.shmcchildren.org](http://www.shmcchildren.org)
Helpful books for you and your child:


Preparing the Preschooler for Surgery

What part about surgery is most stressful for a preschool child?

Preschool-aged children can certainly benefit from preoperative planning, education, and explanations. This preparation should take place several days before the procedure, to give your preschool child an adequate amount of time to prepare. Recognizing what is stressful to your preschool child while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- fear of being away from family and home, or of being left alone
- thinking he/she is in the hospital because he/she is in trouble or being punished
- fear of having a part of the body damaged
- fear of needles and shots
- fear of waking up during surgery
- fear of pain (or the possibility of pain)
- fear of the dark

How do I prepare my preschool child for surgery?

- One of the major fears preschoolers have is fear of the unknown. Your child should be told of surgery several days before the procedure and perhaps even visit the hospital for a tour. Many hospitals will allow you and your child to visit. Touring the hospital before surgery can help your child see the sights, sounds, and events he/she will experience the day of surgery. It can help your child learn about the hospital, and gives him/her time to talk about concerns and questions he/she may have. Contact the hospital's child life department for this service.

- Tell the truth in simple terms and answer all of your child's questions, for example, "Yes, it will hurt, but it will not last long."

- Make sure your child knows why he/she is going to have surgery. It is not uncommon for this age group to have misconceptions regarding hospitalization. Often, children think they have done something wrong or that needles are given to kids who are "bad."

- Dramatic play is a big part of a preschooler's life. Using pictures, stuffed animals, or toys to help your child understand is better than simply telling him/her what will happen. Illustrate the situation clearly for your child. Ask a child life specialist to help explain what will happen, and why, in terms your child can understand. Also discuss therapeutic play activities such as playing "hospital" with your child at home before he/she is admitted for the procedure.

- Give very simple explanations and be careful of the words that you use. For example, say, "The doctor is going to fix your arm." Do not say, "The doctor is going to make a cut on your arm." If you describe anesthesia as "being put to sleep," your preschooler may think of a family pet that died and wonder if he/she will die, too. A better way to phrase it might be: "A doctor will help you sleep (a
different kind of sleep than how you sleep at night) during the operation, and he/she will wake you up after it is over."

- Your child may enjoy reading books about the hospital with the family.
- Allow your child to help pack his/her own suitcase. Bringing a favorite security item, pictures of family and pets, and a special toy can be very comforting.
- Explain the benefits of the surgery in terms your child can understand. For example, "After the doctor fixes your arm, you can play ____ ."
- Learn as much as you can about your child's surgery. Children can tell when their parents are worried. The more you know, the better you will feel and the more you can help explain things to your child.
- Make sure to stay with your child as much as possible - to provide comfort and security.
- Be patient with your child. It is normal for him/her to require more attention. Your child may have temper tantrums or be uncooperative. It is not unusual for your child to return to bedwetting or thumb-sucking. The regressive behavior will usually improve after the stress of the procedure has passed.
- Remember, too, to take care of yourself. Simplify your life during this time and do not be afraid to ask for help from family and friends. Remaining positive and non-stressed can help reduce your child's anxiety.

**Helpful books for you and your child:**

Anne Civardi and Stephen Cartwright. 1993. *Going to the Hospital.* EDC Publishing. (ages 3 to 6)

Fred Rogers. 1997. *Going to the Hospital.* The Putnam Publishing Group. (ages 5 to 6)


Paulette Bourgeois, Brenda Clark (Illustrator). 2000. *Franklin Goes to the Hospital (volume 25).* Scholastic, Inc. (ages 5 to 7)

Virginia Dooley and Miriam Katin. 1996. *Tubes in My Ears: My Trip to the Hospital.* Mondo Publishing. (ages 5 to 7)

From University Health Care: [www.shmcchildren.org](http://www.shmcchildren.org)
Preparing the School-Aged Child for Surgery

What part about surgery is most stressful for a school-aged child?

School-aged children can benefit from preoperative planning, education, and explanations. This preparation should take place a week or two before surgery since preparation too far in advance can produce more anxiety. Recognizing what is stressful to your school-aged child while in the hospital can guide you in preparing him/her for the surgical experience. Common stressors and fears in the hospital may include the following:

- being away from school and friends
- thinking he/she is in the hospital because he/she is bad or is being punished
- having a part of the body destroyed or injured
- loss of control
- pain (or the possibility of pain)
- needles and shots
- dying during surgery

How do I prepare my school-aged child for surgery?

- Tour the facility with your child prior to surgery. Touring the hospital before surgery can help your child see the sights, sounds, and events he/she will experience the day of surgery. It can help your child learn about the hospital, and gives him/her time to talk about concerns and questions. Ask a child life specialist to explain what will happen, and why, in terms your child can understand.

- Make sure your child knows why he/she is having surgery in words he/she can understand. School-aged children may not ask questions about something they think they are supposed to know about, leading a parent to think the child understands what surgery and hospitalization involve.

- Have your child explain back to you what is going to happen in the hospital. School-aged children sometimes will listen carefully, but not understand all that was said. This can help you to learn whether or not your child has a clear understanding of what lies ahead.

- Read books about the hospital or surgery with your entire family.

- Give as many choices as possible - to increase your child's sense of control.

- Emphasize that your child has not done anything wrong and that surgery is not a punishment.

- Explain the benefits of the surgery in terms your child can understand. For example, "After your knee has healed, you will be able to play soccer again."

- Encourage your child's friends to visit the hospital, or to keep in touch with your child by telephone or with letters and cards.

From University Health Care: www.shmcchildren.org
Learn as much as you can about your child's surgery. Children can tell when their parents are worried. The more you know, the better you will be able to help explain things to your child.

A family member should stay with your child as much as possible. Always tell your child when you are leaving, why, and when you will be back. If your child will remain in the hospital for several days, ask family and friends to call and visit often.

Let your child know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry. Encourage him/her to ask questions of the physicians and nurses.

When your child is stressed, they may start regressing and/or displaying new fears, such as being afraid of the dark. Give many compliments and hugs. Parents should always hold their child's hand (not restrain) during tests or procedures.

**Helpful books for you and your child:**


Virginia Dooley and Miriam Katin. 1996. *Tubes in My Ears: My Trip to the Hospital*. Mondo Publishing. ages 5 to 7)

Paulette Bourgeois, Brenda Clark (Illustrator). 2000. *Franklin Goes to the Hospital (volume 25)*. Scholastic, Inc. (ages 5 to 7)


From University Health Care: [www.shmcchildren.org](http://www.shmcchildren.org)
Preparing the Teenager for Surgery

What part about surgery is most stressful for a teenager?

Adolescents like to be active participants in deciding what happens to them, including the kind of care they receive. Parents need to act as partners with their teens in making healthcare decisions. Recognizing the fears that teenagers commonly have when going to a hospital will help you in your preparations. Common fears and concerns may include the following:

- loss of control
- being away from school and friends
- having a part of his/her body damaged or changed in appearance
- fear of surgery and its risks
- pain
- dying during surgery
- fear of the unknown
- fear of what others will think about them being sick or in the hospital

How do I prepare my teenager for surgery?

- Allow your teen to be part of the decision-making process. Encourage him/her to make a list of questions to ask the physicians and nurses.

- Your teen should start learning and preparing as soon as the decision to have surgery is made. Reading books and using the Internet are good places to start.

- Child life specialists can provide age-appropriate explanations and assist teens in finding a variety of resources.

- Teenagers are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand explanations. Parents and healthcare professionals may need to explain treatment in several different ways, without making the teen feel uncomfortable.

- Ask friends from school to send cards or call during recovery.

- Your teen may find it helpful to write down his/her thoughts and feelings in a special notebook or journal.

- Encourage your teen to pick out and bring a few comfort items from home, such as books, hand-held video games, or a cassette tape player.

- During hospitalization, your teen may go through frequent mood swings. It is important to be patient and understanding. Your teen can become withdrawn and not want to talk or answer questions. There are times when he/she may need to alone.

- Let your teen know that it is acceptable to be afraid and to cry. He/she might need to know you have the same worries they do. Reassure them of your support.
- Learn as much as you can about your teen's condition. Teens can tell when their parents are worried. The more you know, the better you will feel and will be able to help explain things.

- Be truthful when answering questions. Teenagers may become angry if they think people are keeping secrets from them. They need to understand what is wrong with their body. How the information is given is often as important as what information is given.

- Privacy is very much a need of your teenager. Teens are often as private about their thoughts and feelings as they are about their bodies. It is necessary to always respect their privacy.

**Helpful books for teens and parents:**

