

Preparing your child for surgery

Visiting the hospital for surgery can be very overwhelming for your child and you. Many children have fears, questions, and wrong ideas about what will happen when they come to hospital. It is very important to reassure them and be truthful. Let your child know what to expect, in a way they can understand.

Give your child some time to prepare

Each child is unique, and you know your child best. Generally, older children need more time to prepare mentally.

Teenagers (13+)

Speak truthfully with your teenager about the decision to go to hospital. Let them know that it is normal to feel scared, worried, or anxious. Encourage them to ask questions and give them honest answers. Appropriate Internet sites and apps such as RCH be positive, Okee (app) and simply sayin (app) can be helpful, if visited with adult supervision. Encourage them to be involved when getting ready to go to hospital.

School aged children (6-12)

Start preparing your child 5-7 days before the surgery. Use play and books to help them understand. Pretend play like role-play can be helpful. Take turns being the doctor or nurse. This can help you find out how much your child understands. Encourage your child to help choose some favourite toys and pack a bag to bring to hospital.

Children (1-5)

Start preparing your child 1-3 days before surgery. You can read books and play games about going to the hospital. Encourage your child to choose some favourite toys to bring with them to the hospital.

Infant (under 1)

Babies have no experience of what is happening, so they rely on how their parent, guardian or carer is feeling. If you are anxious and upset, they may react with similar feelings. If you feel prepared and calm, this can help your baby feel calm. Bringing comfort objects like blankets or a dummy can help support your baby.

Put information into words your child can understand

Do your best to explain things in a way your child can understand. Surgery can mean different things so talk to your child in a **positive way** like “this will mean you will be able to ...” or “this will mean you won’t have to...”

Avoid saying things like “cut you open”. Try to use **neutral or positive words** like the doctor will “fix” or “make an opening” on some part of their body, to help them feel better.

Talking to your child about anaesthetic

Try not to use frightening words when talking to your child about the anaesthetics. Avoid saying things like “**gas**”. Instead you could say “having an anaesthetic is just like going to sleep, then you wake up”.

It can help to explain **what an anaesthetic is** to your child. You could say “When people have surgery, doctors called anaesthetists use medicine, so you don’t feel, see, taste, smell, or hear anything”. **Reassuring** them that once the surgery is finished the medicine is taken away and they wake up. Tell older children that they might feel sleepy or confused when they wake up. Reassure them that you will be there when they wake up.

How to help siblings prepare

Siblings may have concerns around surgery and will also need support. They might feel scared or worried. These are all normal feelings and can be shown in lots of different ways like being agitated, or quiet and withdrawn.

You can help them work through their feelings and questions by:

- including them when role-playing or reading hospital-themed books
- asking them if they have any questions about what it will be like for their brother or sister when they go to hospital
- making sure you explain everything in a way they can understand.

It is important that siblings know the reasons why their brother or sister is having surgery. It can be helpful to make time just for them when the surgery and recovery are over.

Avoid bringing siblings to the hospital. It is best to arrange for someone to care for any siblings on the day of your child’s surgery, so that you can focus on caring for your child during their hospital stay. Discuss who will be caring for the sibling on the day that your other child will be in hospital.

Helpful hints for surgery day

It is **very important** for your child to have an empty stomach (tummy) on the day of surgery. This helps to avoid complications during the surgery.

Follow the directions on the **fasting guide** - located in your hospital paperwork. If your child does not follow the fasting instructions, their surgery may need to be delayed or cancelled.

Give your child a bath or shower and the night before, or morning of the surgery. This helps to reduce the chance of infection. Wash your child’s hair if they are having surgery on their spine or head.

Talk in a calm quiet voice and keep the family routine as normal as possible. Children often respond how parents do. Keeping yourself calm will help to reassure your child.

You **will have to wait** before your child goes to theatre. Offer activities to distract or relax your child. For example, you could say, “Should we read a book?”, “Let’s play a game together”. This can also help to keep you busy and focused.

Tell your child that what they did was very helpful. For example, “You did so well at staying still”, or “You did a good job talking to the nurses”. Focusing on the positive aspects of your child’s behaviour helps to encourage this in the future.

Staff you may meet

There are many different types of staff at Monash Children’s Hospital (MCH). When your child comes in for surgery you may meet:

Admissions clerk: One of the first people you will meet. They will help you complete all the paperwork.

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Nurse: Nurses are in every area of the hospital that you might visit. Some of these areas include the ward, theatre, holding bay and recovery room. The nurse will check your child's weight, vital signs (e.g. temperature, heart rate, blood pressure), and ask some questions to make sure your child is well enough for surgery. They will also put two name bands (ID bands) on your child.

Surgeon: The doctor who performs the surgery. They will come to see you before your child's surgery, and answer any questions that you, or your child has about the surgery.

Anaesthetist: The doctor who will give your child the anaesthetic medicine, so they are asleep during the surgery and medicine so that they wake up when it is all finished. There are a couple of ways the anaesthetist can give the medicine. They will talk about this with you and your child before the surgery. Sometimes, children call them the sleep doctor.

Child life therapy: Specially trained people who help children deal with stress and anxiety that they may feel when coming to hospital for a surgery, appointment, or in an emergency.

Process on the day

At MCH we have a main campus (Clayton Hospital) and two other sites (Dandenong and Casey Hospital). At each location we deliver the same excellent standard of care to all patients and families.

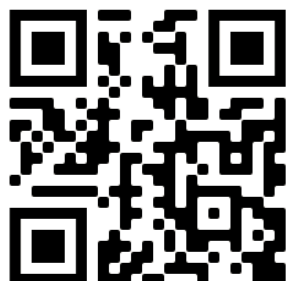
We encourage you and your child to watch the relevant video on your smart device in the **link** or **QR codes** below, explaining what will happen on the day of procedure. You can see the journey from admission to discharge.

<https://monashchildrenshospital.org/patients-and-families/your-childs-surgery/before-you-arrive/>

Clayton



Dandenong



Casey



Follow the instructions on your paperwork about where to go and what time to arrive. Each location is slightly different.

What to bring

- your Medicare card
- any paperwork you have received in the mail from MCH
- if your child takes medications, you should bring them with you, and let your child's nurse know about this
- your child's "My Health, Learning and Development ('green book')" - especially for younger children
- some comfortable pyjamas or loose clothing for your child
- your baby's dummy, teddy, or comfort object

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- some favourite toys, books, or a tablet device to keep your child busy
- for babies and younger children bring nappies and their usual milk in the cup or bottle they use at home
- please make sure your child is not wearing any jewellery, make-up, or nail polish.

If your child is staying overnight after their surgery, one parent, guardian, or carer (over 18 years old) can stay in hospital with them. Siblings cannot stay overnight. Linen and a pillow are provided for the person staying. Meals are only provided for your child. There is a parent room with a fridge and microwave so you can bring food from home. There are also cafes onsite where you can buy food.

It is a good idea to bring:

- toiletries for you and your child
- some comfortable pyjamas or loose clothing for yourself
- phone or tablet chargers
- any special formulas, food, or snacks that your child or you like.

Helpful hints for parents

We are here to support the whole family. It is important that parents understand what will happen when their child comes to hospital. **Please ask questions.** We recommend writing questions down on your phone or in a notebook as you think of them. It is very normal to forget things when you are overwhelmed.

If you are feeling anxious, take slow deep breaths and take a moment to calm yourself. Let the staff know if you are feeling anxious or worried and discuss any concerns with them.

In each patient room there is an information book about the resources and help available at Monash Children's Hospital (MCH).

The hospital has toys and games that your children can play with. Ask your child's nurse. You are also welcome to bring in your child's favourite toy or game.

Although both parents can come on the day of surgery, **only one parent** can go into the operating theatre. This is where your child is given the medicine by the anaesthetist. It is a good idea to explain this to your child and let them decide who will be coming with them (if appropriate for their age).

Arrange for someone to look after any siblings on the day of your child's surgery.

For information

- See our information: *Children's Anaesthetics- frequently asked questions*
- Please watch <http://monashchildrenshospital.org/patients-and-families/your-childs-surgery/before-you-arrive/>
- Visit our website www.monashchildrenshospital.org
- Questions about how to best prepare your child for surgery: call child life therapy service on **0481 904 461**.
- Questions regarding the surgery: call elective surgery services on **1800 786 188**.



For interpreting services call **131 450**

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