

Pediatric Surgery: A Discussion Guide

How pain is managed after surgery can have a big impact on your child's recovery. Non-opioid options can minimize opioid use and enhance recovery overall for your child, getting them back to the sports they love. Below are some tips and questions to get that discussion started.

How much pain is associated with this procedure?

Ask the doctor about the level of pain and duration of discomfort that is typically associated with the type of surgery your child is having so you know what to expect afterward. When it comes to common pediatric surgeries (e.g., ACL, hernia, etc.) pain can vary based on the part of the body that is being operated on and the invasiveness of the procedure.

How will my child's pain be managed immediately after surgery and when we get home?

There are many options to help control your child's pain after surgery. Depending on the procedure and site of care, often patients are sent home with a prescription for additional medications, or even asked to fill a prescription before their surgery takes place. Ask the doctor what the best plan is for your child. You can also ask about who will be managing their pain (the surgeon, an anesthesiologist, etc.).

Why is this medication being recommended?

Your child's prescriptions will be personalized based on the type of procedure they have and their medical history, among other factors. Understanding why certain medications are being recommended can help you to understand your child's options.

How long will my child need to take this medication, and how do we know when we should taper down?

While some medications are used during surgery, some are prescribed afterward. It is important to understand how long your child should be taking these medications and at what point they should stop. Find out if there's anything you can or should do when it comes to starting or stopping pain medication.

Addiction runs in my family, what should I look out for? Are opioids necessary for this procedure and, if prescribed, what should I do about it?

Since the treatment prescribed will be personalized based on your child's medical history, it's important to disclose a history of addiction to your child's doctor. You can work together with the doctor to have an open dialogue about eliminating or minimizing opioid use as much as possible, and what to do if prescribed any opioids to minimize risks.

I want to minimize my child's need for opioids. What other pain management options are available?

Although potent pain relievers, opioids can come with many risks and side effects, especially for children. There are a variety of medications that can be administered before, during, and after surgery to minimize or eliminate the need

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for opioids. They may include non-opioids, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like aspirin or ibuprofen, or long-acting local anesthetics that are injected during a procedure and numb the area around the surgical site for the first few days when pain is at its worst.

What happens when the medications from surgery wear off?

The type of medication(s) your child receives can depend on the type of procedure they have. Start having conversations with your child's doctor before the surgery about any pain or discomfort your child may experience, and make sure you have a plan in place. Non-opioid options can provide pain relief for the first few days following surgery, when pain is often at its peak, but keep in touch with your child's doctor post-surgery and ask about solutions if pain persists or becomes an issue.

What do you need to know about my child to help create a customized pain management plan?

Your child's medical history (e.g., allergies, breathing/respiratory issues, stomach/gastrointestinal issues, current prescriptions, any mood disorders or issues with depression, etc.) will help the surgeon better understand your child's treatment needs.

When we return home, what guidelines should I be aware of? When can my child return to normal activities (e.g., playing sports, attending school, etc.)?

It's important that your child gets plenty of rest when they return home. Talk to the doctor about how long it might take for your child to get back to everyday activities. There may be things he/she can do with your help to help speed their recovery (e.g., proper wound care, physical therapy, etc.).

How long will it take for my child to fully recover from surgery? What will it involve?

Each person's recovery from surgery is personal and can vary depending on the surgery performed and their overall health. Many pediatric surgeries involve rest and limiting physical activity so talk to the doctor about ways you might be able to keep your child entertained and comfortable while they recover after surgery.

If Your Child is Prescribed An Opioid, Ask These Questions:

- Is this safe to take with other medications?
- Is this the lowest appropriate dose/number of pills?
- When can my child stop taking this, and how should I wean them off?
- How should medication be stored at home (e.g., locked away)?
- How can I properly dispose of the medication if he/she doesn't use all of it?