

Paley

WARSAW POLAND

A hospital stay is associated with a whole range of emotions. It is a considerable experience, both for the child and for their parent. On your journey, you will meet people who will take care of your loved ones with empathy, dedication and professionalism. You will be under the tender care of the medical team and the coordinators, including a psychologist. Our team will accompany you at every stage of treatment, including the hospitalization. But before that happens, you need to prepare adequately. We are providing this short guide to help you make even better use of the time before arriving at the hospital and the surgery.



How to prepare your child for surgery?

Explain what will happen

Children have a great imagination. This is their considerable advantage. But sometimes it makes them construct grim scenarios in their minds. This happens especially when they do not know what to expect. So before each medical intervention, tell your child about it and explain what will happen.

With younger children you can pretend play using hand puppets, plush toys, bricks or their favorite toy cars. Playing is a safe way to provide your child with information which is important but sometimes difficult. If your little one enjoys drawing, draw a picture together to show what will happen to them and what will change after the surgery. If you prefer reading to your child, there are many books available on the market to help the child get used to the idea of a hospital.

Older children can have a lot of questions, concerns and fears regarding the surgery. Explain and clarify patiently and if you do not know the answer to any question, write the question down and ask it together during the next doctor's consultation.

Take care of your child's emotions

Just like adults, children can experience various emotions while waiting for surgery. If your child is crying, screaming or afraid, stay close to them and assure that everything they are feeling is alright. We all are afraid and cry sometimes, regardless of our age.

Children could also ask you whether you are afraid of the surgery. Answer sincerely. If you are worried, let your child know using simple words. Add that most people feel stressed in such situations but you know that it will be better after the surgery. Many parents choose not to share their emotions with their children in good faith. They do not want to increase their worry and burden. But children watch their parents and know that something is wrong. They are very good at reading body language, they see the tension in your face and they can feel that a hug is different than usual. These conflicting messages can make it more difficult for the child to cope with a new situation and can cause more anxiety.



Spend time with your child before the surgery

Do something pleasant together: look at photographs, go for a walk, play your favorite game. Make this period of waiting as pleasant and stress-free as possible.

Take their favorite toy or book to the hospital

A cherished plush toy, blanket or book will make the time before and after the surgery more pleasant. Moreover, they may serve as a link between home and the external world, thus strengthening the feeling of safety.

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Tips for parents

A hospital stay is usually an uncommon, extraordinary or unknown event. Depending on their age, temper and previous experiences, children can treat it as a new adventure, challenge or necessity. The prospect of a hospital stay makes some of them feel anxious and frightened. Regardless of your child's reaction, you want to support them during this demanding time.

In order to have the necessary resources and energy to help your daughter or son, you should take care of yourself. This may sound a little tricky. But in fact, it makes a lot of sense.

Do you remember that during an unexpected event on a plane, parents must first put on their oxygen masks and only then assist their children? The same is true for emotional challenges. By taking care of yourself, you will be able to react and respond to your child's needs more efficiently.

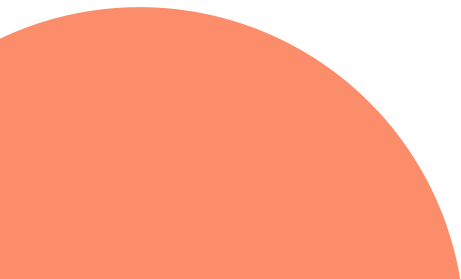
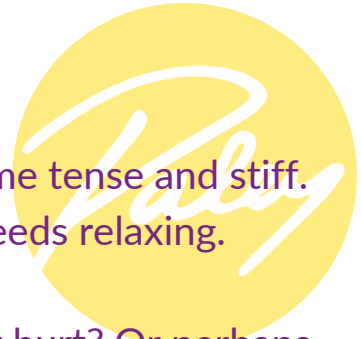
Reflect on your thoughts

The anxiety over your child's surgery is completely natural. However, the mind sometimes plays tricks on us and we start to imagine grim scenarios. The majority of them will never come into being (fortunately!), but they can definitely lower your mood. When you become aware that your thoughts are not supportive and cause even greater anxiety, try to stop them. Redirect your attention to a some other topic.

What does your body reveal?

When we are nervous, our bodies become tense and stiff. Check whether any part of your body needs relaxing.

Perhaps your shoulders are so hard they hurt? Or perhaps your stomach is rock-hard? Perhaps your thighs are shaking? If yes, try to do some relaxation exercises. For example, you can tense and relax your muscles or ask your companion to give you a massage or a hug. Close contact with another person helps the body to relax and relieve the tension.



Breathe

The breath becomes rapid and more shallow under stress. This adds to the anxiety. Focus consciously on your breathing. Take slower and deeper breaths. Observe how your body reacts to such a change. Prepare for a period of tension during the surgery. While waiting for your child, you may experience a whole range of emotions, from sadness, through helplessness to anger. This is all completely natural.

Dare to ask for help

Even heroes sometimes need rest and support.

Ponder on what you need during difficult moments

Perhaps a talk with someone close? Or perhaps sitting in silence? Reading or watching films? Perhaps calling all your friends to keep your mind busy? Collect your ideas and practice them as much as you need, provided they are safe for you and other people.

Remember to ensure your own comfort

Bring something to drink, your favorite snacks and warm clothes with you. Make a list of things you need and pack them into a bag.

Children can easily sense their caregivers' moods, therefore:

- **stay calm and relaxed with your child,**
- **try to maintain the current rhythm of the day,**
- **avoid major changes in your life and at home.**

The hospital stay and surgery will be a sufficiently difficult experience both for you and your child.

Take your child's favorite objects (a blanket, plush toy, pacifier etc.) to the hospital.



- If you are breastfeeding, do not stop before or immediately after the surgery. Apart from the nutritional value, breastfeeding soothes the child and creates a feeling of safety, which is particularly important in new and difficult situations.
- If you feed your child baby formula, remember to take their favorite formula and bottle to the hospital with you.

The baby can be nervous and cry more often than usual during hospitalization. This is completely natural.

Hug, stroke and rock them
(whenever possible).

INFATNS

The day before going to the hospital tell your child where you are going and what will happen.



Be honest with your child. Do not lie to them.

Już wcześniej możecie czytać i pokazywać mu książeczki, które poruszają temat wizyty u lekarza i w szpitalu (np. „Obrazki dla maluchów: dbaj o zdrowie” „Zuzia w szpitalu”, „Franklin idzie do szpitala”).

You can read and show them books about doctor's visits and hospital stays in advance (e.g. “Baby Medical School: My Doctor's Visit”, “My Trip to the Hospital”, “Franklin Goes To The Hospital”). Explain to your child what will happen using simple, age-appropriate words, e.g. “The doctors will fix your leg/treat your arm”.

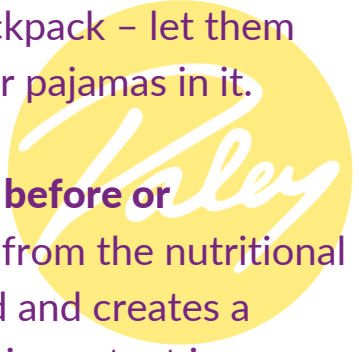
Act out a doctor's visit with your child. This will help the child get used to the situation. A toy doctor kit will be perfect for this purpose. Switch roles: let your child be the patient first and then take this role yourself. You may also use plush animals or figures to play.



**CHILDREN
1-3 YEARS**

Suggest that your child pack their backpack – let them put their favorite toy, blanket, book or pajamas in it.

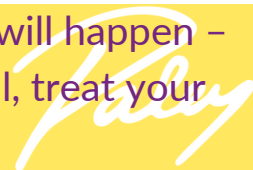
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**CHILDREN
1-3 YEARS**

Begin preparing you child for surgery several (3–7) days before the planned travel to the hospital. You can start earlier by reading books about doctor’s visits and hospital stays (e.g. “My Trip to the Hospital,” “Maisy Goes to the Hospital,” “How Petunia Gets Ready for the Hospital: Tips for an easy hospital stay”).

When playing, get your child used to what will happen – do role plays, make a pretend play hospital, treat your child’s favorite toys.



Draw a plan to show your child what will happen. Remember to include going back home in the plan.

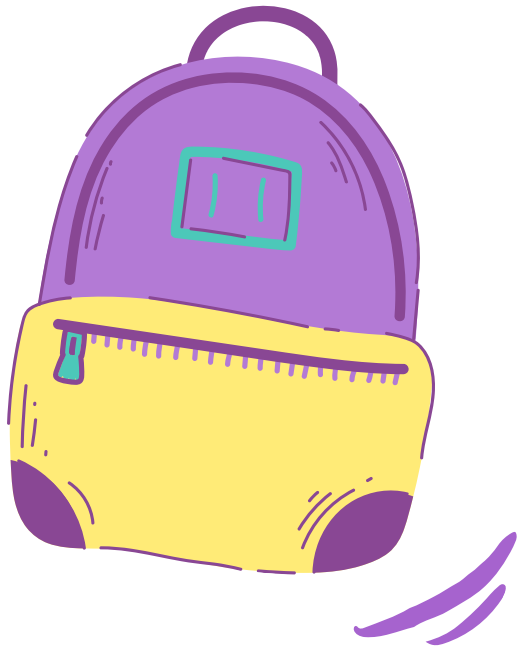
Explain to the child what will happen to them using simple words. Use language the child is able to understand, e.g. “The doctors will treat your legs/arms”, “an IV catheter is a small tube through which you will be given medication”, “you will receive special medication which will make you sleep soundly and peacefully, and then the doctors will fix your leg”.

**CHILDREN
3-5 YEARS**

Do not threaten your child with the hospital or the medical staff. Do not say things like “the lady will give you an injection if your are naughty”.

Assure your child that the hospital is safe and the medical team will do anything they can to make them feel good as soon as possible.

Allow your child to pack their backpack:
let them pack their favorite toys which will make them feel a bit like at home.



**CHILDREN
3-5 YEARS**

Begin preparing you child for surgery approximately 1–2 weeks before the planned travel to the hospital.

- Explain the reasons for the surgery to your child. Tell them what will happen to them, what the treatment process will be like and what will change for the better.
- Assure your child that they will be safe at the hospital.
- Prepare your child for what they could experience and feel – after the surgery they could feel weak or experience different emotions (e.g. sadness, anger, fear or excitement).

All the emotions they could experience are completely natural.

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Answer your child's questions honestly and using simple language. **The more information the child receives from you, the less likely they are to create grim scenarios in their mind.**

**CHILDREN
5-12 YEAR**

Read books to let your child get used to the idea of staying at a hospital (e.g. “S is for Surgery: A Kids Surgery Book from A–Z” or “My Going to Surgery” workbooks).

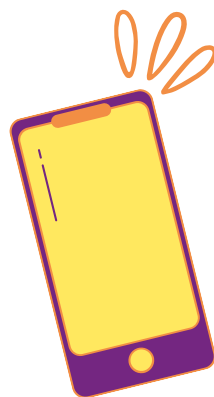
Do not threaten your child with the hospital or the medical staff. Do not say (even if you are nervous) that any medical procedure will be done as a punishment for the child’s inappropriate behavior.

Describe the hospital stay and the surgery as a chance to improve fitness.



Let the child pack the things that will comfort them, are important to them and will make the hospital stay more pleasant.

Ensure that the child is in touch with the people who are important to them. If they are missing someone, let them write a text message, e-mail or letter, or call to him/her.



**CHILDREN
5-12 YEARS**

It is best to involve the adolescent in preparation for surgery from the very beginning. Make sure they have the opportunity to ask questions during doctor's appointments.

When the surgery is scheduled, let your child know.

Remind you child about the upcoming hospitalization one month before the surgery. This will allow the adolescent time to mentally prepare for surgery, run their errands, talk to their loved ones and collect the necessary information.

Encourage your adolescent to actively participate in the preparation for surgery.



Let them make a list of things to take to the hospital, write down any questions they may have, try to contact persons who have already undergone surgery, etc.

**ADOLESCENTS
12-18 YEARS**

Check how your child is feeling. Assure them they can talk to you about anything they want to.

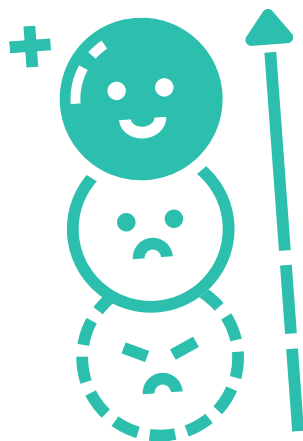
Be ready for an entire range of emotions the child may experience. An **emotional roller coaster** can occur during this period.

Talk to your child about what they imagine their hospital stay will be like and what their hopes are in connection with the surgery.

Help your adolescent keep in touch with their friends and acquaintances.

After the surgery, be with your child and support them.

Be understanding – a hospital stay and surgery are a huge challenge for the entire family.



**ADOLESCENTS
12-18 YEARS**

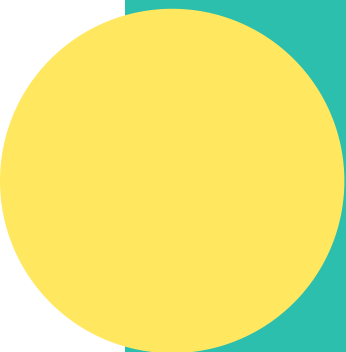
Dear Parents!

Regardless of your child's age, remember to take care of yourself as well in this challenging period. **If you need anything or have any questions, let us know. We will try to help you.**

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