

As a parent, you hate to see your kids hurting, but unfortunately, most children experience pain after surgery. Not only are there physical causes for pain — the surgery itself — but pain can also be affected by your child's mental and emotional frame of mind.

Because children, especially young ones, can't always verbalize what they're feeling, it may be very challenging to determine the level of pain your child is experiencing. Your child's pain management team — your child's surgeon, anesthesiologist and nurses — generally know the usual discomfort for a given operation and can prescribe medication for it, but you, as a parent, know your child best. The team will work closely with you to manage your child's pain.

What kind of pain medication will my child be given?

Your child may receive a variety of pain medications. The pediatric surgeon will order the specific medication(s) that will be most effective, based on the type of surgery your child had, his age and development, and any previous experience he's had with surgery and pain medications.

For instance, if your child has moderate to severe pain, he'll most likely receive narcotics during and after surgery. If your child is in the intensive care unit after surgery, he may also receive sedatives along with analgesics. Sedatives can decrease anxiety, induce sleep, and eliminate the memory of unpleasant events.

Pain medications can also be given in a number of forms; how your child gets them will depend on his age, his condition and the type of medication he's getting:

- Pills to be swallowed
- Liquids to be swallowed
- Intravenous medications, delivered through a needle directly into a vein
- Suppositories, especially if your child has nausea or vomiting

Helping your Child Cope with Pain after Surgery:

A parent's love and comfort are often just as important as — and sometimes even more important than — any pain medication the healthcare team can give your child. You know your child and what comforts and calms her best. Be sure to tell your child's caregivers what your child likes and doesn't like.

Here are a few suggestions to start:

- **Touch is important.** All children need to be held, stroked and touched by those who are most important to them. Ask for help from the nursing staff if you would like to hold your child, but aren't exactly sure how to go about it because of equipment or bandages.
- **Play can help.** It's a familiar part of your child's day. It can help relieve tension for both of you, and can also provide distraction that helps your child feel better. Bring storybooks, coloring books, puzzles, board games, handheld video games (if allowed) and other toys she can use in bed. If your child is able to get out of bed, ask if the hospital has a playroom she can use.
- **Watch and listen.** Ask if a television is available, so your child can watch movies or children's entertainment programs. Music can also be very comforting. Try music or movie with headphones.
- **Get help.** Ask to speak with your pediatric surgeon or nurse, who may be able to offer additional coping strategies for your child.

How you can tell if your baby is in pain (For newborns or small infants)

Even if your baby can't talk yet, he's still capable of communicating his pain to you. Once you recognize pain symptoms in your baby, you can take steps to soothe him. When babies are irritable or uncomfortable, they may show it with:

- High-pitched crying

- Difficulty calming
- Facial grimacing
- Chin quivering
- Difficulty with feeding or taking a pacifier
- Frequent hiccupping, yawning or sneezing (more often seen in newborns)
- Faster or slower breathing than normal
- Avoiding eye contact
- Minimal movement or wanting to be still or quiet

Your baby's healthcare team can use a pain scale that lists these behaviors to estimate your baby's pain level.

How to help your newborn or infant cope:

- **Remember that you're a part of your child's healthcare team.** Talk to your child's physicians and nurses so that you better understand pain and its treatment. Tell them what comforts your child, ask for advice if you need it, and ask questions such as:
 - What kind of pain can I expect my child to have, and for how long?
 - What do I need to know about the pain medications you're giving her?
- **Create a comfortable and safe environment by:**
 - Making eye contact
 - Changing wet diapers and giving her clean, dry clothing when she needs it
 - Turning off the lights or covering your baby
 - Talking in a soft voice

- Changing her position
- Providing "boundaries" by swaddling her with a blanket or surrounding her with a blanket roll
- Giving him "quiet time" and allowing for times of undisturbed sleep
- **Use touch:**
 - Cuddle your child and use a gentle but firm touch to give her comfort and security
 - Hold her hand
 - Rock her in a rocker, swing or your lap
- **Distract him.** Help your newborn focus on something other than the pain by:
 - Feeding him
 - Talking or singing to him in a soothing voice
 - Offering a pacifier for him to suck on
 - Trying a "hands-off" approach to allow your baby to calm himself
 - Trying "hands-on," skin-to-skin care (also called "kangaroo care"); ask your child's nurse for instructions

How to know if your toddler/ school going child is in pain

If your toddler's in pain, he may show it by:

- Not playing as much
- Not eating or drinking as much as usual
- Having difficulty sleeping or napping
- Crying more than usual

- Wanting to be still or quiet
- Being irritable and restless
- Complaining of pain
- Holding or protecting the area that hurts

How you can help your toddler cope

- **Remember that you're a part of the team.** Talk to your child's healthcare team so that you better understand pain and its treatment. Tell them what comforts your child, ask for advice if you need it, and ask questions such as:
 - What kind of pain can I expect my child to have, and for how long?
 - What do I need to know about the pain medications you're giving her?
- **Create a comfortable and safe environment by:**
 - Staying with your child as much as possible.
 - Dimming the lights.
 - Providing quiet time and times of undisturbed sleep.
 - Playing soft music.
 - Speaking softly.
 - Bringing her favorite toys and objects from home.
- **Use your touch:**
 - Use gentle and firm touch to give her comfort and security. Try touching or gently massaging your child's skin, or massaging her back in a firm, slow motion.
 - Hold, cuddle and rock her.

- Hold her hand.
- **Distract him.** Help your toddler focus on something other than the pain by:
 - Telling or reading her stories. Look at a pop-up or sound book.
 - Blowing bubbles.
 - Having her hold a special blanket or stuffed animal.
 - Playing music.
 - Singing songs with her.
 - Having her play with a toy.
 - Watching television or movies together.
 - Offering your child your hand or something soft to squeeze.
 - Helping her do art projects, draw or color.