

# Preparing for surgery: Tips for parents

Children, especially younger ones, respond to their parents' perception of events. Preparing yourself as the parent is one of the best ways to help reduce your child's anxiety and increase their coping skills. When you feel at ease about your child's surgery, he or she will feel confident about it, too. Here are some tips to prepare you and your child for surgery:

- **Remember to write down any questions you may have prior to surgery.** If your child is of school age or a teen, encourage him or her to write down their questions as well.
- **Remain positive when discussing your child's surgery** with medical staff or other family members. Also, simple comments—such as “How exciting! You get to visit the hospital!”—can help your child or teen have a calmer experience at the hospital.
- **Be mindful of your teen looking up information about their upcoming surgery.** Many images and stories on the internet can misrepresent medical experiences, which can lead to fears and misconceptions. It is important to review that information together.
- **Make surgery day a special event** that your child can look forward to with excitement rather than fear. Some families make it a “treat day,” and the child gets to choose what he or she wants to eat for a special dinner.
- **Don't feel obligated to purchase new toys or gadgets for your child.** Do plan to bring an item or a special activity they enjoy. Comfort items, such as a pacifier or favorite blanket, can make your child feel at ease on the day of their surgery.
- **Pretend to use an induction mask on your young child's favorite stuffed animal.** This can be a fun and simple activity you can do at home to show how an induction mask will help them fall asleep.
- **Use roleplay and pictures or books** that depict a positive hospital experience, and discuss them with your child. Some books you may be able to find at your local library include:
  - *Going to the Hospital.* Fred Rogers, 1988.
  - *A Visit to the Sesame Street Hospital* Deborah Huatzig, 1985.
  - *Franklin Goes to the Hospital* Paulette Bourgeois, 2000.
  - *Welwyn Ardsley and the Cosmic Ninjas: Preparing Your Child and Yourself for Anesthesia and Surgery.* David Rosenblum, 2015.
- **Toddlers need repetitive teaching to understand a concept or rule.** This is especially important in reducing their anxiety with medical experiences. Be sure to read books about visiting the hospital, and have your child roleplay with a toy several times before coming in for surgery.

## Pre-op tours

The Child Life Program offers pre-op tours as an additional resource for you and your child to prepare for surgery. To schedule a tour, contact the Child Life Program at 714-456-5299. For more information, visit [ucirvinehealth.org/pedsurgery](http://ucirvinehealth.org/pedsurgery)

