

Fact Sheet

Children's painful procedures and operations: How can parents help?



Sometimes medical procedures can be uncomfortable or painful. Hospital staff will use various methods to reduce your child's pain and discomfort. It is important that pain is managed.

As a parent you know your child best, and can therefore greatly assist staff in helping your child cope with the procedure or surgery.

Things you can do

- Talk to your child's doctor about the procedure/operation that has been scheduled. Be sure to ask any questions that you may have.
- Provide your child with simple and honest information.
- Answer any questions that your child may have. If you don't know the answer to your child's questions try to find out (e.g. tell them that you don't know, but together you will ask the doctor or a nurse).
- Explanation about the reason and nature of the procedure should be given well beforehand. There may only be limited or no opportunity to do so during the actual procedure.
- It is generally helpful for a child to have a parent present during a painful procedure and/or when your child wakes up after surgery. If you feel unable to be present think about arranging for another person your child is comfortable, trusts and feels safe with to be present.
- Distraction is often helpful during a procedure. Distraction involves

encouraging your child to focus on things other than the medical procedure. For example: blowing bubbles, looking at pop-up or other interesting picture books, watching a video, playing with other favourite toys, or singing.

- Use of relaxation strategies may be helpful. It is important that they are practiced beforehand. There are many ways to relax. Some of these include:
 - slow breathing techniques
 - guided imagery: this may involve picturing oneself in a favourite place by imagining what you can see, hear, feel, taste and smell
 - muscle relaxation techniques
 - listening to music (being aware that if your child needs to be still, to keep this in mind for music choice)
- Praise the child for any attempts at using helpful coping strategies. For example:
 - "you used your listening ears"
 - "you used your words to tell us..."
 - "you kept your arm still"
- If your child cries because of the pain let him or her know that it is OK to feel upset.
- It can be helpful to give your child some control over what is happening (e.g. whether they sit or lie down for the procedure); this needs to be discussed with the nurse and/or doctor first.

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- It is good to talk with your child about the procedure afterwards; especially about what your child did that helped them cope. Some children may want to draw a picture about their experience. This helps your child better understand what they experienced which will make it easier should they need to have any more procedures in the future.

More information on helping children cope with painful procedures is available from the following web-site: <http://pediatric-pain.ca/content/Families>

Remember

- As a parent you know your child best, and can therefore greatly assist staff in helping your child cope with the procedure or surgery.
- Be honest and calm when informing your child about the procedure and answering his/her questions.
- Decide on which coping strategies you and your child think would be most helpful.
- It is generally helpful for a child to have a parent present during a painful procedure and/or when your child wakes up after surgery. If you feel unable to be present think about arranging for another person your child is comfortable with to be present.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

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the children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
RANDWICK**

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