

Preparing for your child's pharyngeal flap surgery

Anticipating your child's upcoming surgery can be very stressful for parents. You may find that you have a lot of questions about what will happen before and after surgery. The following is some information to help in planning for the surgery.

What happens before surgery?

When you visit the plastic surgeon, be sure to ask any specific questions about the surgery. Also ask what your child may look like immediately after surgery.

The plastic surgeon's office will give you an appointment for a pre-operative visit at McMaster Children's Hospital several days before the surgery. Bring your child to the Same Day Surgery Unit on the 2nd floor near the yellow elevators unless you have been advised it will be a telephone visit. This appointment will last up to 3 hours.

During the pre-operative visit:

- Your child will see several people including a nurse, an anesthetist and a child life specialist. Please ask them any questions you have about the surgery, the anesthesia or the hospital stay.
- You will be given a checklist to follow the day before surgery. The instructions include when your child should stop eating and drinking before surgery. It is important to follow these rules.

What happens on the day of surgery?

On the day of the surgery bring your child to the Same Day Surgery Unit to register your child. A member of the surgical team will meet you there. If your child is ill, the surgery may be cancelled. The hospital may cancel surgery if there is a shortage of beds available that day. This does not happen very often, but it is a possibility.

A volunteer will go with you and your child to the holding area of the operating room. A member of the operating room team will then bring your child to the operating room. While your child is in the operating room, please wait in the surgery waiting lounge.

Your child will be given a general anesthetic so that he or she will be asleep during the surgery and not feel any pain. After the surgery is completed your child will be monitored in the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) for about an hour.

As soon as possible, the nurse will bring you to the PACU to be with your child. When your child is ready to leave the PACU, a nurse will take you and your child to one of the children's wards.

What happens after surgery?

The ward nurses will continue to care for your child during his or her recovery. When your child wakes up, he or she will have a sore throat. You may see some bloody drainage coming from your child's nose or mouth. This is normal. There will also be stitches on the roof of the mouth. These will dissolve in about 6 weeks. For a few days after surgery your child may also have a sore neck.

Your child may begin to snore at night. This can be very loud at first. It should become quieter over the next few months. Some children snore up to a year or more after the surgery.

After surgery, the amount and type of pain is different for each child. Your child will be given pain medication so he or she will feel more comfortable. The plastic surgeon will give you a prescription for pain medication to use at home. To learn other ways to make your child comfortable, ask your nurse for the information sheet called **Learning about relieving your child's pain**.

What can my child eat and drink?

- At first, your child will have sips of water from a cup. Your child should not have Popsicles® or use a straw.
- While in hospital and for 2 weeks after surgery, it is important that your child eat only pureed or soft foods. Pureed foods are foods that have been blended into a liquid or soft paste. Examples of pureed foods are smoothies, yogurt and applesauce. Examples of soft foods are well-cooked pasta, scrambled eggs and pancakes.
- Your child should eat with a spoon, and not a fork.
- **Do not give your child crunchy or sticky foods.** This is so that hard or rough pieces of food can't hurt the stitches during healing.

Your child may have “bad breath”. This is normal and will go away when the flap has healed. Your child can use a small amount of water or salt water to rinse his or her mouth after eating or drinking. Continue to gently brush your child's teeth.

When can my child go home?

Your child will stay in hospital until he or she is able to drink easily. This may take from 1 to 4 days.

Before going home, your child should be drinking well, have a normal temperature (no fever), and have pain well-managed with medication.

When does my child need to see the surgeon?

Make an appointment to see the plastic surgeon 10 to 14 days after surgery.

You will also need a follow-up appointment with the Cleft Lip and Palate Team Speech-Language Pathologist in about a month.

When should I call the surgeon?

Call your child's surgeon if:

- Your child injures the repaired area
- The area around the stitches is red or swollen
- There is bleeding or discharge from the stitches
- Your child feels ill or has a fever - a temperature higher than 38.9°C or 102°F for more than 24 hours
- Your child is not getting enough to drink. Signs may include: a dry mouth, no tears, not passing urine regularly or urine that is too dark.
- You have any concerns about your child

Dr. Strumas: 905-521-2100, ext. 73594

- If you cannot reach the surgeon, call your family doctor.
- If you are not able to reach either doctor, bring your child to the emergency room at McMaster Children's Hospital.
- If you are not in the Hamilton area, go to your nearest hospital emergency room.

**For more information please call:
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905-521-2100, ext. 77069**