

Home Care After Heart Surgery

How do I care for the incisions (the cuts made during surgery)?

- As much as possible, do not cover the incisions with Band-Aids® or dressings. Try to leave them open to the air.
 - There may be a small amount of clear yellow or dark bloody fluid draining from the incisions, which is normal. You can use a Band-Aid® or light dressing for this. Please remove the dressing as soon as there is no more drainage.
- Do not put any lotion or ointment on the incisions for 6 weeks after surgery, unless your doctor tells you to.
- Wash the incisions and chest tube sites daily with soap and water, and gently pat them dry. Use a clean washcloth and towel each time. Use the washcloth on the incisions before using it to clean any other parts of the body.
- Your child can shower with their back to the flow of water after all their tubes and IVs are removed. Your child can also take a bath in the tub, but make sure that they do not let their incisions or chest tube sites go underwater until they're completely healed and there are no obvious scabs.
- Wear clean clothing that fits loosely over the incisions.
- Leave in place any Steri-Strips™ or special tapes over the incisions until they fall off or until we remove them at the follow-up appointment.
- If your child has a chest tube stitch still in place, your doctor or a home care nurse will remove it 5 days after the tube is taken out.

Are there any activities that children should avoid after surgery?

For 2 weeks after surgery:

- Keep your child home from school, day care, and other crowded areas such as stores and churches.
- Do not let your child go swimming.

For 6 weeks after surgery:

- Avoid physical activity that risks injury to your child, such as gym class, contact sports, sledding, roller blading, skiing, bike riding, or using trampolines.
- Do not let your child lift anything heavier than 10 pounds.
- Your child may go swimming in chlorinated water only (like a pool). After 6 weeks, they may swim in unchlorinated water (like an ocean, lake, or pond).
- If your child is old enough to drive, do not let them drive for 6 weeks.

Other than the things mentioned above, let your child play at their own pace. Children are good at limiting their own activity. Children can lay on their stomach or have “tummy time.” You can lift your child under their arms if they are comfortable. We encourage non-contact physical activity such as walking, gently using an elliptical, and climbing stairs. restrictions can be different for each patient. Talk with your doctor or nurse about your child’s individual needs.

How will surgery affect my child’s behavior?

A child’s surgery is a difficult experience for everyone in the family, and your child may have trouble adjusting once they are home. For a short time, your child may behave differently from normal, with such problems as:

- Sleep pattern changes
- Clingy behavior

- Eating changes
- Hyperactivity (feeling restless and overactive)
- New fears, such as not wanting to sleep alone or needing a night light
- Acting younger than they are, and doing things like bed-wetting or thumb-sucking

This behavior is normal and temporary (it should go away in time). Here's how you can help:

- Let your child know that they are safe and well.
- Read them books about hospitals and doctors or play hospital. This may help them normalize their experience and decrease their anxiety about future appointments.
- Distract your child with games, toys, and music.

What medications should my child take after surgery?

Please have your child take their prescribed medication as directed.

What immunizations and medications can my child have to help prevent infections after surgery?

Routine immunizations

Routine immunizations (vaccines) are given to babies and children to protect them from serious illnesses such as diphtheria, hepatitis, whooping cough, polio, and others. Children who are having heart surgery should not receive these immunizations 2 weeks before surgery, and it is best to avoid routine immunizations for 2 weeks after heart surgery. This does not include flu, RSV, or pneumococcal vaccines.

Influenza (flu) vaccines

Children with some heart problems are at increased risk for influenza.

Influenza can cause life-threatening pneumonia (a lung infection). They should

receive the flu vaccine each year. Children 6 months to 12 years of age need 2 shots (unless they have had an influenza vaccine before, in which case only 1 shot may be necessary). Please talk with your primary doctor or pediatrician about the flu vaccine.

Pneumococcal and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines

Talk with your doctor or nurse about your child's individual needs for these types of vaccines.

Beyfortus®

Beyfortus® is a medication used to protect against RSV. Talk with your doctor or nurse about your child's individual needs for this medication.

Can my child travel after heart surgery?

Yes, your child can travel. Follow these guidelines:

- Children should always be in an age-appropriate safety seat while traveling. Do not add extra padding across their chest area. The straps on the seat need to be tight enough to securely hold your child.
- Make sure that you travel with important phone numbers, including your pediatric cardiologist.
- Pack enough medication, including a couple extra doses in case your travel plans change at the last minute
- Make sure that you know where the closest major children's hospital is located close to where you're traveling.
- **Children with cyanotic (blue) heart defects should never fly in a non-pressurized plane. You should also always use oxygen on airplane flights while in the air.**
- Take a recent letter from your cardiologist in case of an emergency.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if your child has any of these symptoms after surgery:

- Temperature over 101.5 °F
- Increased tiredness
- A new, dry cough
- Shortness of breath
- A change in how their incisions look - such as cloudy yellow drainage, increased redness or swelling - or if their incision opens up
- Increased pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Signs of congestive heart failure

When should I schedule follow-up appointments after my child's surgery?

You may schedule follow-up appointments with your child's pediatrician or family doctor and your cardiologist after your child's surgery.

Scheduling with your pediatrician or family doctor

- If your child is a newborn (less than 30 days old), call your doctor's office to schedule a follow-up appointment within 2-3 days after they leave the hospital.
- If your child is not a newborn, you can schedule an appointment as needed (for example, their next routine visit or well-child visit).

Scheduling with your cardiologist

If you have a cardiologist at the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital Congenital Heart Center:

- We will schedule a follow-up appointment for you with the Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Clinic before you leave the hospital. This appointment will be with the nurse practitioner 1-2 weeks after the surgery.
 - This appointment may be done virtually or in-person. If your appointment is in person, please arrive 30 minutes early so your child can get a chest x-ray.
- We will schedule a follow-up appointment for you with the Pediatric Cardiology Clinic before you leave the hospital. This appointment will be with the cardiologist 4-6 weeks after the surgery.

If you have a referring or outside (non-Michigan Medicine) cardiologist:

- Please call to schedule a follow-up appointment with your referring cardiologist for 1-2 weeks after the surgery. We are able to help you with this, if needed.

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