

# Caring for Your Child After Heart Surgery

## Care of the Incision

- A tub bath may be given one week after surgery
  - Wash daily with mild soap and water and pat dry
  - Do not use lotions or creams until the incision is well healed (2 weeks)
  - The steri-strips (small white tapes) will come off by themselves
- No bandage or dressings are needed
- Keep a shirt over the incision to prevent scratching
  - Mild itching is a normal sign of healing
- Avoid exposing incision for six months to a year
  - Sunlight will darken the scar
  - Wear a shirt
  - You may use sunscreen after the incision is well healed
- Call the surgeon if you notice
  - Increased redness or swelling
  - Increased pain or discomfort
  - Yellow or green drainage
  - Fever higher than 101 degrees Fahrenheit or 38.5 degrees Centigrade taken rectally

## Activity

- Treat your child as normal as possible. Children will usually limit their own activity after surgery. The following activities should be avoided for one month after discharge:
  - No bike riding, skateboarding, skating, tree climbing, hanging or swinging from bars
  - No sports involving the arms such as tennis, baseball, basketball, football or soccer
  - No weight lifting
  - No swimming, although getting wet and splashing is okay
- Always use a car seat, or wear a seat belt when traveling
- Avoid crowded places and sick people for two weeks after going home
  - Ask your cardiologist when your child may return to school

## Diet

- Your child may return to their normal diet after surgery unless otherwise instructed
- Babies may require smaller or more frequent feedings
- Your child's appetite will return to normal and may even increase in a month or so

## Important Reminders

- Tell your pediatrician that your child should not have any immunization for one month following heart surgery.
- Routine dental care and cleaning should be delayed for 4 - 6 months after surgery.
- Ask your cardiologist if your child needs antibiotics before visits to the dentist or any other surgery to prevent an infection in the heart (Endocarditis).
- Speak to your cardiologist before making travel or vacation plans.

## Doctor's Appointments After Surgery

- See your child's heart surgeon, 1-2 weeks after going home.
  - Dr.: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Where: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- See your child's cardiologist, 2-3 weeks after going home
  - Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Where: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- Call your child's pediatrician, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and make an appointment to see him after going home.

## When to Call the Doctor

- Call the surgeon, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ if there is any yellow/green drainage or increased redness, swelling, or pain in the incision.
- Call the cardiologist, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ if you notice your child has any of the following signs:
  - Trouble breathing, gets short of breath, breathing faster than usual
  - Is blue (cyanotic) or more pale than usual
  - Has swollen or puffy eyelids, hands or feet
  - Is more fussy or sleepy than usual
  - Eats less than usual (babies = less than 2 oz. formula or longer than 40 minutes)
  - Feels dizzy or faints
  - Persistent vomiting or diarrhea (lasting longer than 24 hours)

## Notes

- Hospitalization can be overwhelming for your child and the entire family. It is not unusual for children to experience some or all of the following:
  - Irregular sleep patterns – night waking, bad dreams or nightmares
  - Change in behavior (regression), change in school performance
- Brother and sisters may show these signs as well. Remember they are usually short lived and with patience and reassurance disappear within a month after hospitalization.