What to Expect When Your Child Goes to Hospital

Children's Health Scotland

Promoting the healthcare rights and needs of children and young people

Children's Health Scotland (CHS), formerly known as Action for Sick Children Scotland, is the only Scottish charity which promotes the needs of all sick children and young people in our healthcare system. We work for improved standards and quality of care for children and young people when they are ill in hospital, at home or in the community. We aim to represent their needs and those of their families and ensure that their voices influence health policy, planning and practice. We do this in partnership with parents, carers, professionals and children and young people themselves.

Before the age of seven many children will have a hospital admission. Most will be treated, recover and go home the same day or after a short stay. However 18% of under sevens will have an acute admission and for some, their illness may be more complicated and become a long-term condition, requiring frequent hospital visits or admissions throughout their lives.

We have known for a long time that most children benefit from the support of a parent or carer when in hospital. In the same way we recognise the importance of good, appropriate and timely information to help families cope better with an unknown or worrying situation. This booklet will answer some of the questions you may have and is designed to be used with any information you receive from the hospital.

Most hospitals send information and instructions before a hospital visit (pre-admission information or booklet). Remember to ask for this if you do not receive it.

CHS is a member of the European Association for Children in Hospital (EACH) which has produced the EACH charter. This sets out 10 standards for children and young people's health care at times of illness.

www.each-for-sick-children.org

Children's
Health Scotland

In this guide 'my child' and 'your child' refers to children looked after by birth parents and other carers for example foster and kinship carers.

CHS is grateful to its Family Participation Group and healthcare professionals for input to this booklet.

This guide is an update to the guide we produced in 2014.

Going into hospital

What is it like?

At the hospital your child will be admitted and a nurse will take them to their bed or room. They will have their own named nurse who will introduce themselves to them. All hospital staff wear name badges and distinct uniforms, the type and colour of the uniform shows what they do. Doctors no longer wear a white coat.

Children's wards are bright, cheerful places decorated to appeal to children. Many hospitals have a separate play area with toys and games to suit all ages and there is usually a TV and IT equipment. Some hospitals will also have a designated school area.

What do I tell my child?

What you tell your child depends on their age and the reason for their stay. A teenager may want a full explanation, whereas a five year old, needs a shorter and simpler one. Children will be more relaxed if they know as much as possible about what will happen to them as this helps them prepare. It is best to be as straightforward as possible answering their questions and to reassure them while trying to show you are not worried yourself. Even young children pick up on anxiety. The happier and more relaxed your child is, the quicker they will feel better.

Tips for a happier stay

- Ask the ward if you can arrange a pre-admission visit before you come into hospital. Check out what will happen on the day, as well as what facilities and support are available such as a prayer room and interpreting and translation services.
- Ask your local library or look on our website **www.childrenshealthscotland.org** for books to prepare children to go into hospital.
- Explain to young children what will happen a few days before admission. Break down each step.
- Make sure your child knows they will come home again. Do not specify a particular day, as this might change.
- Older children need information too. Do not assume they understand because they have not asked or appear confident. Use words that help them understand to help them feel confident.
- Do not promise it will not hurt, as it might; be truthful and talk about ways to manage pain. See our website for the '*Helping Children Cope With Pain*', **https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/?s=pain booklet**.
- Reassure your child and let them know that you will stay with them; if this is not possible let them know why you must leave and when you will be back.

What should we take with us?

- Things to make them feel comfortable such as their favourite toy, blanket, mug, dummy or bottle. If you bring a soft toy it should be washed before coming into hospital to help infection control. If you are unsure what is allowed or needed speak to the staff.
- Cool comfortable day and night clothes, slippers, shoes.
- Toiletries.
- Things to do and read – books, comics, toys, games, puzzles, writing/drawing materials. Electrical equipment will need to be checked by hospital electricians before use.
- Remember to pack your own bag too.

The staff will give you a pre-admissions letter which tells you what you need to know and pack for your child. Staff will help, so please ask if you are unsure what to bring.

Can I stay with my child?

It might be upsetting for your child to be away from home, especially if they are unwell. Staff will encourage you to stay with them as much as you can. Most hospitals provide a bed or chair for you to stay overnight, some have accommodation which may be away from the ward.

Staying overnight is recommended, especially for a young child and all hospitals should make provision for you to stay. Do check arrangements with your hospital before admission, especially if you are breast feeding or need to have your baby stay too. For an emergency admission you will automatically be accommodated.

During the day there will often be a designated parent/carer room, or a day room away from the ward.

The EACH charter recommends:

ARTICLE 2: Children in hospital have the right to have their parents or parent substitute with them at all times.

ARTICLE 3: Accommodation should be offered to all parents and they should be helped and encouraged to stay.

What happens to my child’s education if they have to stay in hospital?

If your child is staying in hospital for more than five days or is in hospital on a regular basis they have the right to receive school lessons. Your child’s school should liaise with the hospital about this.

On the ward

Who looks after your child?

NURSES – work in teams caring for several children at the same time. Your child will have a named nurse who can answer any questions you or your child may have. They will also be able to tell you and your child how they are coping.

DOCTORS – working in paediatrics (children's medicine). These doctors are trained to work with children. They understand that children can worry and know how to make them feel comfortable and relaxed. The consultant is the most senior doctor, and other doctors work with them. The consultant will usually meet you and your child to talk about their condition and treatment.

PLAY SPECIALISTS – specially trained to use play as a way to help children. These staff organise specialist play in hospital to prepare children for treatment. You may meet them at your pre-admission visit. Some hospitals also have play assistants who provide basic play. If your child is a teenager the hospital may have play specialists for them too. Ask about this.

What is the daily routine?

Each hospital has its own routine. It may start with breakfast, followed by the ward round where the doctors and nursing team visit each patient for an update on progress and treatment. However, doctors can come and go as they work with different patients.

The morning routine includes patient washing and bed changing where necessary. Lunch is usually followed by a quiet time.

Parents/carers can visit their child anytime during the day. Other visitors can be there too but some hospitals only allow other visitors at specific times, and/or limit the number attending at any one time. Ask your named nurse or other staff about this to avoid unnecessary travel, cost and waiting around.

The evening meal is usually around 5.00pm. You may see children being admitted and discharged, taken for tests and operations and taking school lessons. Sometimes there is a snack in the evening.

What about eating and drinking?

Children's meals are provided at set times. The menu will have a halal or vegetarian option. Specific health related dietary requirements can be discussed with your child's named nurse.

If you want to give your child other food please check with your named nurse. If your child is on a specific diet staff need to know exactly what they are eating. You should also tell your nurse about any allergies your child may have. Be careful not to leave food where it can be reached by other children who may have a food allergy or intolerance. If you stay, you will be expected to provide food for yourself. Hospitals may have a cafe or hospital cafeteria you can use.

How can I help?

You can care for your child in hospital as you would at home, by washing, changing, feeding and putting them to bed. This may include reading a story, playing a game or singing a song quietly. This may help your child to settle quickly.

You know your child best, so you can help them understand what is happening and explain what they are feeling to other people. Don't be afraid to ask staff how you can be involved; your help is appreciated.

How can I have a break if I stay?

When you need to leave or take a break explain to your child where you are going and when you will be back. They may be upset and feel vulnerable. It's much better for them to express their emotions rather than bottle them up. Reassure them.

If your child is young and doesn't want you to leave, try walking around the ward where they can see you. Then, still on the ward, stay out of sight for longer periods, but always return. This helps to build their confidence about being left. After a day or so, leave for half an hour and then gradually increase the time you are away.

If you leave hospital e.g. to go home, always tell the staff you are going and when you expect to return; let them know when you get back too. Leaving your child with your photo, or other comforter can also help.

Staying and visiting

What if I can’t stay?

As a parent/carer you may also have responsibilities at home or work which means you can’t stay with your child or visit as much as you’d like. Talk to the nurse in charge or named nurse to keep up to date. You can keep in touch with the named nurse by phone. You can also send letters and postcards, which most children enjoy receiving. Some hospitals allow mobile phones to be used in some areas. Check on the ward for where you can or cannot use a mobile phone. Be aware that there are strict rules about the use of phone cameras; never take photos of other children unless you have both their and their parent/carers’ permission as appropriate.

Can relatives or friends help?

Share staying with or visiting your child with others they know well. This can help you get some rest and give you some time off. Tell the ward staff or named nurse who is involved with your child and who may stay or visit. Let them know if there is anyone who is legally restricted from visiting your child.

Visitors are important, but too many people at one time is tiring for your child. Hospital stays may be long and boring, spreading out visitors will help make a stay in hospital more interesting.

Managing the rest of the family?

It’s important brothers and sisters don’t feel left out. Include them and tell them what’s happening. Encouraging brothers, sisters, and friends to write a card, make a present, or talk on the phone can make everyone feel better. If your child is in hospital for more than a few days, ask a relative or friend to stay with them to let you spend time at home with your other children.

Financial support

Some families may be entitled to financial support for travelling or staying in hospital. Ask about this as soon as possible.

Having an operation

What should I tell my child

Reassure your child and explain why the procedure and hospital stay are needed and how it will help them. The unknown creates fear and you can reassure them with an honest explanation of what will happen. Tell them:

- Why they are having the procedure
- What it will involve
- If and when it will hurt.

Be honest. Don't tell them it will not hurt, if it will, as they may not believe you next time and this adds to their fear. If you don't know, say so and speak to the doctor or nurse for more information.

Reassure your child that doctors and nurses know how to make them better, and the operation is part of this. Explain that they will go to sleep during the operation, and be given medication (anaesthetic) to help them sleep, before they go into the operating room. Make use of the play specialist, who will use toys and storytelling to prepare your child.

What if my child wants to know more?

It is useful to explain to your child that they will probably miss a meal before their operation and feel very hungry. **It is very dangerous for them to have food or drink before an operation. They must follow the 'fasting times and instructions'** (when your child is allowed to eat or drink for the last time before an operation) given by the staff.

If your child eats or drinks too near the operation it may be cancelled. Always be careful and check before giving them food, drink or medication.

Pain relief cream is rubbed on to the skin to numb it ready for the anaesthetic needle so it won't hurt as much. Alternatively, your child may be asked to put on a mask to breathe in anaesthetic. Either method will make them feel sleepy as they become unconscious. You can find out more by going to the Royal College of Anaesthetists website:

www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo

What will happen on the day?

If your child is to have a bath or shower before the operation, you can offer to do this yourself if your child is young. Children sometimes have to wear an operating gown with loose fastening ties with nothing on underneath. Your child might not like this, so ask if it's possible for them to keep on their own clothes e.g. pyjamas or underwear. Try and do this early on so you can tell your child what to expect.

Most hospitals will encourage you to stay with your child. However whether it is routine for a parent/carer to go with a child into the anaesthetic room depends on the hospital. Find out well in advance by asking the nurse in charge or the anaesthetist.

If your child will be more settled with you there, and you are confident you can cope in the anaesthetic room, it may help the anaesthetist to have you there too. It is a worrying time for you too, and seeing your child unconscious can be difficult. If you feel you can't go into the anaesthetic room, and your child wants you there, maybe someone else can take your place or be available to give you support. Talk to the nurse in charge about these matters as well as the best time to leave before and come back after the operation.

What happens afterwards?

Your child will spend time in the recovery area immediately after the operation. Here the theatre team check your child is well. Often parents/carers will want to be with their child as they wake up. Each hospital has its own practice; talk to your child's anaesthetists or nurse in charge to find out what happens at your hospital after an operation. You will be told when your child comes out of recovery and is back in the ward or room.

When they return to the ward your child will need to rest and sleep as much as possible to aid recovery. Don't worry if they sleep a lot, or if they're restless, they will sleep more peacefully as the anaesthetic wears off. Nurses keep a close eye on patients recovering from an operation, they will tell you when it's safe for your child to drink, sit up, or go to the toilet.

Going home

Make sure you know how you are getting home. Make arrangements in advance so that when you're told you can leave hospital you are ready. Remember to sort out transport, because unless your child needs an ambulance you will have to make your own way home.

You may hear quite suddenly that your child can go home and feel worried about caring for them without medical and nursing staff on hand.

When your child is discharged you will be given all the medicines, pain relief and dressings you need for the next few days. You may get them on the ward or you may need to collect them from the hospital pharmacy. Take time to talk to the nurse in charge before you leave. Make sure you are clear about the medicines you have been given and if there is any other medicine that can be given with it; ask who will change the dressing and when and who to contact if you need medical advice. You may have visits from the community or home care team, find out when these will happen and how often.

If your child needs special equipment (e.g. nebuliser, suction machine), you will be taught how it works, what spares you need and what to do if it goes wrong or needs replacing.

Ask any questions you need to, and ask for instructions to be written down if you prefer. Make sure you have the contact details you need.

Follow-up appointments?

Sometimes you will be given a follow-up appointment at the Out-Patients clinic to check your child's progress and recovery. You may be given a date before you leave hospital, or by post once you're home. If you don't hear within two weeks, phone the ward to find out what's happening. The hospital should send your GP a letter about your child's condition, and any medicines they're taking. Check when you next visit your doctor's practice that they've received this letter.

Getting back to normal

At home

Your child may be unsettled and upset for a while afterwards. They may cling to you and cry if you leave them. By showing your love and support, you will help them to feel secure again. Your child may want to talk about what happened and how they feel. Younger children can express themselves best through play. Hospital and doctor-related toys and books help them do this.

Teenagers need to deal with their experiences too. Try to make opportunities for a chat even though they might not want to talk to you and prefer talking to friends.

Children and young people with learning difficulties also need to express their feelings You will know best what helps. This might involve your child's school or other professionals who work with them.

If you have other children, their sibling's stay in hospital might affect them too. Be open to their worries and notice if they behave differently. They might be jealous of the attention their sibling receives and may appreciate extra time with you or the opportunity to share their feelings with you. Playing might help them too.

You may feel insecure, worried and unsure about what to expect in relation to your child's recovery and behaviour. If you have any worries or questions contact the ward, your GP or NHS 24. It is OK to ask for help and advice.

Please use this space for telephone numbers where you might get help:

NHS 24 0800 22 44 88 (111 out of hours)

Your GP ....

The hospital ward ....

Your health visitor ....

Community Children's Nurse ....

At school

Your child might feel worried about going back to nursery or school. Encourage them to speak to you about how they feel. For example, they may want you to take them into class on their first day back; check with your school if this is OK.

Let teachers and others working with your child know about their experience and how they coped.

Together you may need to develop support strategies, talk about any medication they need to take at school, whether they can take part in activities like PE and when to rest. Sometimes a 'phased return' can be arranged where your child goes back for a few hours a day, building up to a full day. If your child will be off school for a while and able to study, speak to the school about how they will continue their studies at home.

If the hospital experience has been stressful, the school might be able to offer access to a counsellor. You can ask if this service is available.

A child's view on hospital care – tell the staff

To help your child cope with their experience, encourage them to write or draw about their hospital stay. Let them know that their experience can help other children and can pass on their suggestions to hospital staff. Staff value feedback as a positive contribution towards making their service better.

Your feedback – discuss your views with health professionals

Your opinion is very important too. Tell hospital staff and/or your GP what was good about your child's treatment and where care could have been better. It is important for them to find out how supported you felt throughout your child's treatment and recovery.

Helpful organisations and resources

Children's Health Scotland
www.childrenshealthscotland.org

Carers Trust
www.carers.org.uk

Children in the Highlands Information Point (CHIP+)
www.chipplus.org.uk

Contact
www.cafamily.org.uk

Enquire
www.enquire.org.uk

Family Support and Information Service (Greater Glasgow and Clyde)
http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-and-information-services/family-support-and-information-service/rhc/
Tel: 0141 452 4011/4012 Email: FSIS@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

Parent-to-Parent (Tayside)
www.parent-to-parent.org

Kindred Scotland
www.kindred-scotland.org

Young Carers
www.youngcarersnet.co.uk

Hospichill-relaxation skills for hospital
hospichill.net

Edinburgh children's hospital charity
www.echcharity.org

DID YOU KNOW: You can get an interpreter or information in a different format (like Easy Read, audio or sign language) when using NHS services. If you have a planned visit to hospital your GP can organise this for you.

“Going into hospital is a very frightening experience for a 5 year old, he feels powerless and although as a parent you can try and explain what’s going to happen there is still a gap to bridge. Personally I feel Children’s Health Scotland helps to bridge this gap.”

Mother of a 5 year old boy, Central Scotland

“The use of Children’s Health Scotland play material really made my son more comfortable with the thought of going for an operation. He has special needs and the toys were used in a way he understood with plenty of time given to him to ask questions. A really valuable service.”

Mother of 9 year old in Lanarkshire.

“Knowing there is somewhere I can turn to and get easy to understand information is really important… The help given to my son and family has been brilliant.”

Mother and young boy diagnosed with a learning disability, Renfrewshire.

Children's Health Scotland is the only charity in Scotland dedicated to informing, promoting and campaigning on behalf of the needs of ALL sick children and young people within our healthcare system.

For information in your language phone 0131 553 6553.

للحصول على معلومات بلغتك التي تتحدث بها، الرجاء الإتصال على هاتف رقم:
0131 553 6553

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欲想索取閣下所操之語文資料，請致電 0131 553 6553。

Aby uzyskać informacje w Waszym języku, prosimy o kontakt pod numerem telefonu 01315536553.

Pentru informatii in limba dumneavoastra sunati la 0131 553 6553

For a full list of our publications please visit **www.childrenshealthscotland.org**

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