

## Care at Home after Neurosurgery

### Neurosurgery Department

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
604-875-2345 1-888-300-3088  
www.bcchildrens.ca

Your child has had neurosurgery – this pamphlet will give you an idea of what to expect and how to care for your child in the coming months. For easy reading, he or she will be used alternately. Please make the pronouns fit your child

### How do I help my child with pain and discomfort?

Many children have headaches and/or pain around the surgery site (incision) for some time. If your child has pain, you can give regular doses of acetaminophen, sometimes called Tylenol, or other pain medication suggested by your doctor.

It is normal for the area around the incision to feel numb. The feeling in the area will come back after several months.

As the incision heals it may become itchy. Try to stop your child from scratching the incision. Scratching might prevent the incision from healing properly and may cause an infection. To help the itch try blowing COOL air over it with a hairdryer.

If your child's surgery involved the temple area, they may find it hard to chew for 1-2 months. This will slowly improve. Offer foods that do not need a lot of chewing so your child does not find meals uncomfortable. If your child has had surgery involving their back, they may have some pain in their neck and/or back. Regular stretching can help with

this. Only stretch as far as is comfortable. For 2-3 months following this type of surgery heavy lifting (over 10 pounds) should be avoided.



Call your family doctor if you note any of the following:

- suddenly begins to have headaches when they have not had any before
- has headaches that get worse
- has headache pain that can't be controlled with the medication suggested
- has headache pain that wakes them from sleep

### How do I care for the incision (cut)?

Leave the incision open to the air. It heals faster when it is uncovered.

Wash incision with mild shampoo/water **daily for 2 weeks** following your child's surgery. You will need to scrub incision lightly with washcloth or clean finger pads to help prevent scab formation with each wash. **Always use clean running water for this wash.** Pat the area dry.

Showers are better than baths for 2-3 weeks after surgery. If bathing is easier, keep the surgical area out of the water as we do not want that area to be soaked in water for **4-6 weeks**.

If your child is in diapers and the incision is on their back, protect the area with a barrier

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flap until healed. Your nurse will show you how to change this flap with each diaper change.

During your child's daily wash, look at the incision. Check that it is healing well.



Call your family doctor if you note any of the following:

- more redness or swelling around the incision
- pain around the incision that is getting worse, not better
- the incision is pulling apart
- fluid or pus coming out of the incision – **if the fluid is clear, go to your local emergency department**
- your child has a temperature over 38.5 degrees Celsius or 101 degrees Fahrenheit
- your child seems unwell

### Getting the stitches out.

Your child's incision has been closed with:

- stitches that dissolve
- stitches that do not dissolve

Stitches that dissolve will not need to be removed. They will fall out on their own in 4-6 weeks. Do not put any creams or ointments on the incision unless your doctor has told you to do this.

Stitches that do not dissolve will need to be removed. This happens 10-14 days following surgery.

Make an appointment with your family doctor for two weeks after surgery to have the incision looked at and, if needed, the stitches removed.

### What is okay for my child to do?

Allow your child to rest and play as they feel able. Follow their lead. Discourage rough and tumble play with anyone.

Your child can return to school or daycare

We recommend no contact sports or riding bikes/scooters for at least 3 months following surgery. Wait until after your child has seen the surgeon for follow up.

If the stitches are fully dissolved and incision is healed well after 4-6 weeks, it is okay to return to water activities such as swimming or taking full baths. Discuss this with your surgeon at your follow up appointment.

If you are unsure about a specific activity your child routinely does – ask your care provider.

### Does my child need special equipment?

Your child may need some extra equipment following surgery.

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If your child needs a soft or hard helmet, braces, splints or anything else of this kind, we will discuss this and arrange this with you before going home.

- be moody and irritable
- be less alert and responsive
- have a seizure



### When to See Your Child's Doctor/Go to the Emergency If...

If your child has had skull or brain surgery they could have increased pressure in their brain. The following signs may indicate this and you need to see a doctor right away:

#### A baby may:

- be cranky and irritable
- be less alert, respond to very little or seem asleep
- be sick to their stomach a lot
- have a cry that sounds more high pitched than usual
- have a bulging spot on the soft spot on their head
- have eyes that may not be straight
- have troubles sucking or swallowing

#### A child or youth may:

- have headaches in the front of their head that are worse in the morning. These headaches may feel better when they stand up
- have vomiting
- have trouble seeing clearly or complain of seeing double
- feel dizzy and look clumsy



If your child has any of these signs, call the neurosurgical service at B.C.'s Children's Hospital at 604-875-2161 or go to your local hospital.

### When do we come back for follow up?

You will need the following follow up appointments:

- Your family doctor/pediatrician  
\_\_\_\_\_ weeks after surgery
- Your Neurosurgeon  
\_\_\_\_\_ weeks after surgery

Your follow up appointment with the neurosurgeon may be made before you go home. If this is not possible, their office will contact you within 2 weeks.



If you don't hear from them within this time frame, call them at **604-875-2094**.