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# Going Home After Neurosurgery

## Table of Contents

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How do I help my child with pain and discomfort .....	1
How do I care for the wound .....	2
Getting the stitches, sometimes called sutures or staples out .....	2
What is ok for my child to do?.....	3
Does my child need any equipment? .....	4
Are there any signs I need to watch for?.....	4
Coming back for follow up.....	5
Give this to your family doctor to read.....	6
 Call.....	6



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

Many children have pain around the wound for some time. Many children have headaches. If your child has pain you can give acetaminophen, sometimes called Tylenol, or other pain medication suggested by your doctor. Sometimes you will receive a prescription for acetaminophen with codeine. Always follow the instructions of the doctor or pharmacist with all medications.



### *Call your family doctor if your child:*

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

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


As the wound heals it may become itchy. Try to prevent your child from scratching the wound. Too much scratching might prevent the wound from healing properly, and can cause infection. To relieve the itch try blowing **cool** air over it with a hairdryer.

If the operation involves the temple area some children may find it hard to chew for one to two months as the jaw heals. This will slowly improve. Try to offer soft foods that do not need a lot of chewing so the child does not find meals uncomfortable.

Children with operations of the spine might have some discomfort of the neck or back. Regular stretching can help with this. Only stretch as far as feels okay. For 2 to 3 months after these types of operations, heavy lifting should be avoided. Lift only things less than 10 pounds. If you think it may be too heavy it probably is.

## How do I care for the wound?

Leave the wound open to the air as often as you can. It heals faster when it is uncovered than when covered.

Wounds take a few weeks to heal.  Call your family doctor or pediatrician if:

- there is increasing redness and/or swelling around the wound.
- the wound feels painful and tender and this gets worse rather than better.
- the wound oozes fluid. If you see clear fluid, which looks like water get help right away.
- your child has a temperature over 38.5 degrees Celsius or 101 degrees Fahrenheit.
- your child seems feverish or sick.
- the wound pulls apart.

Showers are better than baths for the first 2 to 3 weeks after surgery. If bathing is easier, try to keep the surgery area out of the water. Bath water has more germs than clean running shower water.

You can shampoo hair daily. You can wet the head to clean it but don't soak a wound for long periods. Always use clean water for the shampoo. If there are staples (metal clips) do not use a blow dryer with warm air, as the staples can over heat and cause a burn.

If your child is in diapers some doctors would like you to protect their back wound with a barrier flap until it heals. A nurse will show you how to make a barrier flap and make sure you have supplies to go home. Change the flap with each diaper change.

## **Getting the stitches, sometimes called sutures or staples out.**

Your child's wound has been closed with:

- staples
- sutures that dissolve
- sutures that do not dissolve

Look at the wound once a day for the first week after going home, to make sure that things are healing well.

Sutures that dissolve do not need to be removed. They usually begin to break down and fall out in 2 to 4 weeks. It is sometimes helpful to see your family doctor or pediatrician, to update them on the progress of the surgery/treatment. At that visit ask the doctor to check that the wound has healed properly. Do not put any creams or ointments on the wound unless your doctor told you to do this.

Staples and some kinds of sutures need to be taken out 10 to 14 days after surgery. Make an appointment with either your family doctor or the General Pediatric Clinic at B.C.'s Children's Hospital. We will give you a staple remover to take with you.

**Please make sure you take this pamphlet when you go to your family doctor to get the staples out.** The instructions on how to use the remover are at the end of the pamphlet.

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

Allow your child to rest and play as he feels able. Follow his lead. Most children know their limits.

Ask the surgeon for advice about when your child can go back to school or daycare.

We recommend no contact sports or riding bikes for at least 3 months after most types of neurosurgery. Wait until the child has seen the surgeon for follow up. Try not to allow rough and tumble play with anyone. If you are not sure, ask.

If the wound has healed well after 2 weeks then it is OK to return to water sports such as swimming, and taking baths. It is best to see your family doctor before doing these activities.

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

## **Does my child need any equipment?**

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

## **Are there any signs I need to watch for?**

*If your child had skull or brain surgery* watch for these signs of increased pressure in her brain. These signs can occur following surgery and if present are usually seen in the first 2 weeks.

### ***An infant may:***

- be very cranky and irritable.
- be much less alert, respond to very little and seem asleep.
- be sick to his stomach a lot.
- have a cry that sounds more high pitched than normal.
- have a full, bulging soft spot on the head. This soft spot is also called a fontanel.
- have eyes that may not be straight.
- have trouble sucking and swallowing.

### ***A child or youth may:***

- have headaches in the front of the head. These are worse in the morning and they may get better when he stands up. In some children the headache returns and gets worse until it fills the whole head and is there all the time.
- vomiting.
- have trouble seeing clearly, or complain of seeing double.

- feel dizzy and look clumsy.
- be moody and irritable.
- be less and less alert and responsive.
- have a seizure.

***If your child had spinal surgery*** watch for the signs of the spinal nerve being pinched:

- numbness and tingling in the arms or legs that is new or getting worse.
- weakness in an arm or leg that is new or getting worse.
- loss of bladder or bowel control.

Children who have had spinal surgery can also have signs of increased pressure in their brain. See the list above. This could happen if there is an infection in the area of the wound.




**If your child has any of these signs, call the neurosurgical service at B.C.'s Children's Hospital right away at 604-875-2161.**

## **Coming back for follow-up**

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Make an appointment with your family doctor or pediatrician, for about 1 to 4 weeks after surgery.

Your child will see the neurosurgeon, usually 8 to 12 weeks after the surgery. Sometimes, the neurosurgeon might need to see you earlier, and sometimes this follow-up can be later than 12 weeks. Your child may need more tests at time. If so then you will be contacted.

The nurse or unit clerk may be able to arrange the follow-up appointment with the neurosurgeon for you before you leave. If this is not possible the neurosurgeon's office will usually contact you within 2 weeks, with an appointment time. If you don't hear from us in that timeframe, please feel free to  call us at 604-875-2094.

## **Give this to your family doctor to read**

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### **Staple Removal - Information for the Family Doctor:**

The family has been given a staple remover for you to use. Remove the staples 10 to 14 days after surgery. If there are any concerns with the wound such as incomplete healing, wound dehiscence, discharge or other signs of infection, call 604-875-2161 and ask for the neurosurgical resident or fellow on-call.

### **Using the staple remover:**

- place the double pronged edge under the staple to be removed.
- firmly depress the handle, bringing the single-edged prong down on top of the staple.
- the staple should come out smoothly with little tugging.
- if there is any crusting around the staples, we suggest you soak the area with normal saline and gauze for several minutes before starting the procedure.
- discard the tool after use.



### **Call:**

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For appointments: 604-875-2094

For urgent concerns: 604-875-2161 and ask for the neurosurgeon on call

If you feel it is an emergency, go to your local hospital.

Developed by the health care professionals of the Neurosciences Department with assistance from the Learning & Development Department

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