

Surgery Preparation for Teenagers

Adolescents like to be active participants in deciding what happens to them this also includes when they are hospitalized. When adolescents are included in making decisions regarding their healthcare they are more compliant and cope more effectively. Recognizing typical concerns and reactions of this age group will help you prepare your adolescent for surgery. Common fears and concerns may include the following:

- Loss of control
- Being away from school and friends
- Having a part of his/her body damaged or changed in appearance
- Fear of surgery and its risks
- Fear of waking up during surgery
- Pain
- Dying during surgery
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of what others will think about them being sick or in the hospital

How do I prepare my teenager for surgery?

- Allow your teen to be part of the decision-making process. Encourage him/her to make a list of questions to ask the physicians and nurses.
- For a teenager, learning and preparing for surgery should start as soon as the decision to have surgery is made. Reading books, talking with others who have had similar surgeries, and the Internet can be a good start.
- Contact a Child Life Specialist at 972.566.2879 for additional resources and to schedule a preparation visit prior to surgery. This can include: age-appropriate explanations, demonstration with actual medical equipment, and a hospital tour.
- Explain procedures or what to expect in different ways without making your teenager feel uncomfortable. Teenagers are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand an explanation.
- Discuss with your teenager about his/her preference in disclosing information to friends at school about the planned surgery and whether he/she would like visitors.
- A journal may be a helpful outlet for your teenager to express feelings, concerns, and thoughts about his/her surgery.
- Encourage your teenager to bring activities from home such as a game system, favorite book, music, etc. to act as a diversion. Also, remind teenagers to pack comfortable clothing to wear such as pajamas after surgery.

- Be patient and understanding with your teenager. Teens may experience frequent mood swings while in the hospital. There may be times when your teenager is withdrawn and does not want to talk or answer questions.
- Give permission for your teenager to show or talk about his/her emotions. It may be helpful to share that you also have some of the same worries as they do.
- Learn as much as you can about the procedure, this will help you prepare your teenager and help both of you feel better.
- Be truthful when answering questions. How information is disclosed is often as important as what information is given. Teenagers have the right to know what is wrong with their body and what will happen.
- Advocate that your teenager's privacy is respected. This includes thoughts, feelings, as well as their bodies.

Helpful Resources for Teens and Parents:

- Coping With A Hospital Stay by Sharon Carter and Judy Monnig
- The Patient's Guide to Anesthesia by A. J. Hill
- Hospital Smarts by Theodore Tyberg and Kenneth Rothaus