

# Treating Your Child's Pain: Surgery

Often after children have surgery, they have problems with pain. Luckily, there are ways to help ease this type of pain. Read on to find out how your child's pain from surgery can be managed.

## How is pain judged?

To treat a child's pain, it is important to find out how bad the pain is. There are several ways to tell if a child is in pain.

1. **Ask the child how much pain she has.** This is the most reliable way to assess the level of pain your child feels. This needs to be done in a way that the child understands. An age-appropriate pain assessment tool such as the FACES scale can help. Older children are able to use a number scale from 0 to 10. Even though getting children to rate their pain is often difficult, it is the most reliable way to determine the amount of pain they are experiencing.
2. **A child's body and behavior often show pain.** For example, a child may make a "pain" face (scrunch her nose and eyes), hold or rub the area of the body that hurts, cry in a different way than usual, or sleep or eat less than usual. Parents are often the best judges of these behaviors.
3. **Other signs of pain that can be measured** include changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing. These are usually recorded in the child's medical chart and can be evaluated for change over time.

## Pain medicines

There are a wide variety of pain medicines that can help decrease pain after surgery. The decision about which one to use will depend on your child's age and the severity and type of pain he has.

Pain medicine is usually given to a child in a way that does not hurt. Most pain medicines are given in pill or liquid form or put into a vein through a small tube (IV). Medicines should be given regularly so pain is controlled. It's harder to ease pain once it gets worse.

There are a variety of pain medicines used to treat pain, including

- *Non-opioids* like acetaminophen and ibuprofen (Tylenol is one brand of acetaminophen. Advil and Motrin are brands of ibuprofen.)
- *Opioids* like codeine and morphine
- Topical and local *anesthetics*, such as lidocaine, and "numbing" *creams*
- *Nerve blocks* in which numbing medicines are injected into certain nerves in the body
- *Epidural or caudal blocks* in which numbing medicines are injected into the space beneath the spine to decrease pain in central areas of the body (chest, stomach, both legs)

In some cases, when children are in the hospital they can use a machine called a *patient-controlled analgesia device*. This is an easy-to-use device that allows the child to decide when he needs more medicine. If your child is in pain, he simply pushes the button and more medicine is given through the IV. There are controls on the pump to prevent your child from getting too much medicine.

Some parents fear their child will become addicted to pain medicines. However, this is very rare. All patients, including children, deserve to have as little pain as possible.

When used properly, pain medicines are very safe and are an important part of your child's medical treatment.

## Other ways to help manage pain after surgery

In addition to pain medicines, there are other ways to help ease your child's pain after surgery.

- Complementary and alternative medicine treatments such as acupuncture, massage, and biofeedback may help ease pain. Be sure to talk with your child's doctor before starting any alternative treatments for your child, to make sure they do not interfere with her other treatments.
- Physical therapy exercises and water therapy may help relax the body and ease pain.
- Distraction with music, video games, or reading can help to minimize pain.

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## From your doctor

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