

After Your Child's Cranial Surgery

Overview

Congratulations! You have achieved a significant milestone, and your child's surgery is now over. With this surgery behind you, I encourage you to take some time to simply take a deep breath, get some sleep try to put all the worry you have been feeling behind you. I would also like provide some help on a few questions that always seem to come up in the post-operative period. Hopefully, by addressing these things now, I can spare you some worry and allow you to focus on the good times that lie ahead for you and your child.

Pain Management

There is no way to avoid it. Surgery sometimes hurts. Fortunately, for children undergoing cranial surgery, this pain is generally treatable with Tylenol and Motrin only. Although some surgeons may prescribe medications containing narcotic pain relievers, it has been my experience that children generally don't need such strong pain medications and may become nauseated or constipated while taking them. When taking Tylenol and Motrin, I frequently recommend that these medications be given in a staggered fashion, alternating which medication is given every 3 hours. This staggered schedule is often very effective in controlling post-operative pain. If you feel that Tylenol and Motrin are not adequately controlling your child's pain, please contact me and we can discuss strategies for improving your baby's pain control.

Incision Care

Your child's scalp incision was closed using all absorbable stitches. That means there is nothing to remove. All of the sutures will eventually dissolve and melt away on their own. Once you go home from the hospital, you do not need to continue applying antibiotic ointments to the incision. You only need to wash your child's hair as you normally would several times a week. If some crusting develops along the incision, you can clean this gently with peroxide and a Q-tip. Lastly, it is OK to bathe your child normally once you get home.

Activity

Your child can generally resume normal, age-appropriate activity within several weeks of your cranial surgery. I feel it is my job to make your child's cranial reconstruction strong enough to withstand normal daily child activities, and in general, I hope that you will not worry too much about day-to-day activities. During the first few weeks following surgery, however, I ask that your child not take up new contact sports such as football, boxing or soccer. In deciding what activities are OK, use your common sense. If you are not sure if an activity is appropriate, please call me. I would be happy to discuss things with you.

Swelling

Facial and scalp swelling are a normal part of cranial surgery. If your child has undergone a surgery involving the front part of the skull, it is likely that her eyes will swell shut. This

swelling generally reaches its peak at 24-36 hours after surgery and then gradually begins to subside. If your child's eyes have swollen shut, I expect that they may begin to re-open by 3-4 days after surgery. More than half of your child's swelling will be gone by 1-2 weeks after surgery, and it will be nearly completely resolved by 6 weeks after surgery.

Fever

Low grade fever in the first few days following surgery is to be expected. In this early time period, fever almost never represents infection. Feel free to treat low grade fevers as you normally would, usually with Tylenol.

Reasons to Call

If you become worried about your child or feel that something is not right, please call. It is important to me that you feel you can get answers and reassurance when you are worried. Also, please let us know if your child experiences increased swelling, redness, drainage or worsening pain as these may be signs of an infection. Fortunately, infections following cranial surgery are rare and generally don't become apparent until 5-7 days after surgery.

Follow-up

I will plan to see your child for routine post-surgery follow-up approximately **6 weeks after surgery**. This appointment generally will already have been made for you at your last clinic visit. If you are not sure when your appointment will be, please call.

How to Contact Us

When you leave the hospital, I will give you my mobile phone number so that you can reach me after hours. I have found that most patients do not call unless they have real concerns, and if you have a concern, I want to hear from you.

For non-urgent questions, you may email me at earl.gage@mercy.net. It may take up to 2 days for me to respond personally by email.

During the daytime hours, you may also call our craniofacial nurse practitioner, DeAnn Wilson, PNP-C, for routine questions or concerns. You may call her directly during normal business hours at 314-251-1858. You may also call our office main line at 314-251-4772.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of caring for your child!