

# What You Need to Know Following Your Child's Craniofacial Surgery

Main Hospital Number 01 878 4200

Craniofacial Office 01 878 4883



Temple Street

CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

## Ready for Home

Your child will be discharged home once they have recovered; this includes the following:

- Both your child's eyes must be open so they can see.
- The wound must be clean and dry with no openings in the skin.
- Your child must be drinking well and regaining their appetite.
- Your child should be comfortable and pain free.

The Craniofacial Nurse Specialist will visit you and your child on the ward to answer any questions you may have before you leave.

## Hair washing and care of your child's wound



Always wash and dry your hands before touching your child's wound. Keep your child's nails clean and short and if they are old enough to understand explain to them how important it is not to rub or pick at their

wound. Your child's nurse will help you wash your child's hair and wound before you leave so you will be confident doing this at home.

It is recommended that you gently feel around your child's head during hair washing as their head will still be swollen and you won't see or feel the normal "lumps and bumps"

from the “plates and screws”. There will also be some small gaps and unevenness between the bones as new bone grows and fills in over the coming weeks. This is all to be expected and nothing to worry about.

If you are given the remainder of your child’s clear gel ointment, continue to use it as shown on the wound until it is finished.

Wash your child’s hair (including the wound) with a gentle shampoo as shown by the nurse. If your child uses conditioner, they may still do so but avoid putting it on the wound as it coats the sutures (stitches); use it along the lengths and ends of hair instead.

Your child’s sutures are absorbable which means they will dissolve and do not need to be removed. Occasionally, it is necessary to use sutures that do not dissolve. If this is the case, the Craniofacial / Plastic Surgery team will advise you about their removal. This can usually be done by your GP or at your local hospital or health centre.

The sutures will have closed all the layers of skin on your child’s wound 10 days after surgery. They will then start dissolving and slowly fall away from the wound. Scabs will usually form about 21 days after surgery and it is very important to continue washing regularly to encourage both the sutures and scabs to fall away. The scabs can become dry and crusty. If this happens, put some Vaseline or olive oil on them two or three times a day and continue washing.

Occasionally, children may have a local reaction to the “plates and screws” and become red or hot in areas on their head. It is usually not necessary to start antibiotic treatment for this unless your child shows signs of infection such as high

temperature, being “off form”, feeling unwell, complaining of pain or if the wound smells or the area looks different.

If you have any concerns about your child’s wound while at home, contact the Craniofacial Nurse Specialist or a member of the Craniofacial / Plastic surgery team who will advise you.

## **Swelling**

Your child’s head will usually remain swollen for up to 2 – 3 weeks after their surgery and will gradually become less noticeable. As the swelling reduces, you may notice “lumps and bumps” - this is normal. It takes up to 2 years following surgery for the “plates and screws” to absorb and for your child to fully grow into their new head shape.

## **Falls and bumps**

If your child has a fall or a bump following their surgery do not panic. If it is a minor fall / bump, comfort them, distract them with their favourite toy or food, give them some pain relief and watch them, as you would have done before their surgery.

If it is more serious, it is always advisable to have your child checked by your GP or at your local hospital. It is not necessary to bring them to Temple Street Children’s Hospital to be seen. The biggest risk of injury following surgery would be if something pierced your child’s skin. A member of the Craniofacial / Plastic Surgery team may be contacted on the main hospital telephone number (01 878 4200) by your GP or local hospital or health centre at anytime for advice.

## Pain Relief

It is advised to continue giving your child over the counter pain relief medication for up to one week after surgery and then wean (reduce) the amount you give them each day. As a wound can be tender, give some pain relief before washing their wound for the first week at home. Your child's nurse will give you information on how often you can give Paracetamol and Ibuprofen at home.



## Eating and Drinking

Your child must be drinking enough fluids to keep hydrated. Some children may have a reduced appetite following surgery, it may take them a week or two to fully regain it. Small amounts of nutritious food regularly are advised.

## Sleeping

Your child's sleeping pattern may be upset for a number of weeks following surgery. This is normal as they were not in their usual routine while in hospital and had an anaesthetic. Your child should gradually return to the same sleeping pattern when they go home.

## Activities

Keep your child out of school and crèche for 6 weeks until their first post surgery appointment in OPD with the

Craniofacial / Plastic surgery team. During this time, they should reduce activities that could result in a fall or bang to their head such as cycling, skateboarding, swimming and contact sports. If your child has siblings who are old enough to understand, explain to them about the importance of gentle playtime.

If your child is outside in hot sunny weather, they should wear a hat or bandana or stay in the shade to protect their wound, as sun cream is not advised until the wound is fully healed.

## Flying

It is advised not to take your child on a flight until after they attend their first appointment after their surgery. Essential travel before this needs to be discussed with the team.

## Vaccinations

Your child may continue with their vaccination (immunisation) schedule from their first appointment after surgery onwards.



## **Important Points to Remember**

If your child is unwell in the days or weeks following surgery, it is always advised to bring them to their GP for a check up. Most of the time, it is not related to their craniofacial surgery. They may simply be teething, have a tummy upset or an ear infection. Your GP can contact us at any time for advice.

### **Contact Details**

If you have any concerns when you go home please contact:

St Gabriel's ward directly on 01 878 4680 / 878 4681

or

Shirley Bracken Craniofacial Nurse Specialist on  
01 878 4200 Bleep 711 or 01 892 1782

or

A member of the Craniofacial/Plastic surgery team directly  
through the Hospital Switchboard on 01 878 4200

or

Anne McGillivray Cleft & Craniofacial Services Manager on  
01 878 4200 Bleep 796 or mobile 087 9888725

Please remember to wash your hands or use hand gel when  
visiting the hospital

Children's art work provided by friends of the  
National Paediatric Craniofacial Centre

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