Advice after Heart Surgery
A guide for parents, guardians and carers

Introduction

This information gives you general advice following your child’s admission to the Children’s Heart Unit at the Freeman Hospital. Please ask a member of the team if you have any questions or concerns.

Outpatient appointment

Most children are reviewed by their Cardiologist in an outpatient clinic within 4-6 weeks of being discharged. If you do not receive an appointment before discharge or via the post soon after discharge then please contact your paediatric cardiac liaison nurse (number at the end of this leaflet.)

Medication

Some children will need medication following heart surgery. You will be provided with a four week supply from the hospital, but any further supplies will require a prescription from your G.P. We would strongly advise you to obtain a prescription from your local G.P. as soon as possible after discharge in order to allow the local pharmacist time to obtain the correct medicines for your child. It is essential to continue your child’s medication until told otherwise by their cardiologist.

Nursing staff will explain how to give your child’s medicines before they leave hospital, and will give demonstrations if necessary. It is important that you have a thorough understanding of how their child’s medication needs to be given, including the required doses and timing.

Wound care

By the time your child is discharged from hospital the wound should be healing well. The stitches in the main wound are dissolvable and the drain site stitches can usually be removed five days following the removal of the drain; if you are discharged before this time then we will arrange an appointment for their removal with the practice nurse at your local G.P’s practice. Some children complain of itchy skin around the wound site. This is normal as the skin begins to heal. If the wound becomes red, sore and inflamed or if there is any oozing then please contact your paediatric cardiac liaison nurse or ward 23 at any time.
Your child can have a shallow bath while some stitches remain. The water level should remain below the wound, and you should avoid using highly perfumed bath products, which could irritate the area. Take care and be very gentle when washing the chest. Pat the wound dry with a clean towel.

**Returning to normal activity**

Most children return back to school around 2-4 weeks following surgery; some children find it easier to start with half days before returning to their normal routine. If your child’s school requests more information then please speak to the paediatric cardiac liaison nurse.

Following surgery your child should avoid sporting activities for one month. Children should avoid rough or boisterous play that could cause injury to their chest. When lifting your child you should continue to use the technique you were shown in the hospital. Your child should avoid swimming until they have been seen in clinic by their cardiologist, this is to ensure the wound is completely healed, which in some cases can take 4-6 weeks. It is fine to take your children with you when going shopping, out for walks, visiting family and friends or similar activities, but it is highly advisable to avoid people with obvious infections such as coughs and colds during the first weeks following discharge.

**Development**

After being in hospital your child’s development and behaviour may take a step backwards, e.g. going back to using a bottle or a dummy after being without, or if toilet trained they may start to have accidents again. This is quite normal and is usually only short term as their regular routine is re-established.

If you have any worries about your child once you are home then please contact your G.P. or health visitor for advice. Alternatively you may get in touch with one of the Paediatric Cardiac Liaison Nurses (the number is below).

**Contact numbers**

Ward 23  
0191 213 7023 (24 hours)

Jacqui Laydon and Paddy Walsh (paediatric cardiac liaison nurses)  
0191 213 7344 (9.00am- 5.00pm Monday to Friday)

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02 or e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

**Useful websites**

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk. On this website there is an information prescription generator [www.nhs.uk/ips](http://www.nhs.uk/ips) which brings together a wealth of approved patient information from the NHS and charity partners which you may find helpful.
Discharge checklist

Before your child is discharged we would like you to consider the following to ensure you are prepared for home.

• Do you have an appointment arranged for your child’s wound stitches?
  Yes □ No □

• Do you know when your child’s medicines are due and how to draw them up?
  Yes □ No □

• Are there any specific requirements for storage of your child’s medicines and do you know how to get a further supply in the community?
  Yes □ No □

• Do you have an outpatient appointment arranged with your cardiologist following discharge?
  Yes □ No □

• Have you been given a discharge letter to give to your GP/Health visitor/School Nurse to let them know of your admission to hospital?
  Yes □ No □

• Do you have a two week supply of feeding equipment and/or specialist baby milk?
  Yes □ No □

• Do you know who to contact in your local hospital/community team if required?
  Yes □ No □

If you have answered No to any of the above please speak to your child’s nurse.

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