

# Preparing for your child's surgery



It can be a difficult and anxious time in the lead up to your child's surgery. Most parents have lots of questions about what to expect, what to pack for the hospital and how to prepare themselves and their child. Please do not hesitate to contact your local cleft team if you have questions. The following tips may help:

## Tip no. 1 – Relax and accept offers of help

- You may feel you are on a rollercoaster of emotions. This is completely normal so don't feel bad about accepting help or looking for answers to questions you may have.
- Preparation for a hospital stay is usually harder on parents than on children. Accept support from family members if offered, e.g. child minding of siblings, supplying home cooked meals.
- Take lots of photos if your child was born with a cleft involving the lip as they will look very different after surgery.

## Tip no. 2 – What to pack

Don't pack too much as there is limited storage space in most hospital wards. Just bring a few essential and comfort items for your child and yourself. Pack enough light clothing and toiletries for a 2-3 night stay. The following ideas might help:

- Light, front closing clothing that doesn't need to be pulled over your child's head to limit the soreness of bumping against fresh wounds on the lip. Babygrows are good for younger children.
- Nappies, wipes, nappy bags and any creams that you usually use on your child's skin. Pack a new, small, soft toothbrush. Bring a couple of pairs of PJs or tracksuits for the older child.
- Plenty of bibs as babies and toddlers tend to drool and dribble quite a bit after surgery on their mouth.
- Bring your child's feeding bottle along with any of their favourite cup/plate/spoon from home. Bring enough formula milk for the 1<sup>st</sup> day in hospital.
- If you have a small buggy/stroller that folds neatly under a cot, it's a good idea to bring as an unsettled baby may nap in a reclined position in one they are familiar with.
- Older children are advised to eat puréed food following surgery so pack a favourite food item or drink if you think they may be fussy about hospital food.
- Bring age-appropriate toys & games to pass the time.
- Pack snacks and water for yourself, along with coins for hospital vending machines.
- Pack light and comfortable clothing for yourself, along with slippers or flip-flops to wear on your feet.
- Pack a small notebook and pen to jot down questions you may have or information you might be given.
- Don't forget your phone and charger.

## Tip no. 3. – Don't forget other, less obvious things!

- Take a note of your child's ward name, floor and bed number as it's easy to lose your way around busy hospitals. Ask for directions to the nearest parent toilet and the canteen/restaurant.
- Check on meals for parents – can you bring food into the ward? What are the meal times in the canteen/restaurant? Who do you check in with when leaving the ward for a toilet or meal break?
- Stock up on age-appropriate paracetamol and ibuprofen to have at home.
- Get as much rest & sleep before admission as you can. Trying to sleep in a hospital environment is very difficult and tiring. Parents are usually accommodated in a recliner chair beside their child.
- It is perfectly ok to have a cry either before, during or after your child's hospital stay. You are not alone and every parent feels emotional.
- Please ask any questions you may have – there's no such thing as a 'silly' question.