



## **CRANIAL VAULT REMODELING POST-OPERATIVE PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS**

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### Feeding

- For the first few days after surgery, your child will be given fluids intravenously, through an IV directly into his or her veins. Immediately after anesthesia, we do not encourage children to eat, but once a few hours have passed children may begin to take liquids by mouth.
- Your child may require additional blood products in the 24 hours after surgery.
- It may take a day or two for your child to return to the usual feeding regimen. In the first 48 hours after surgery it is typical for your child's eyes to swell closed. While feeding is encouraged during this time, it may be disorienting for your baby, and require extra effort to get him or her to feed.
- One of the requirements for going home is that your child is drinking well. Children do not have to be eating their usual full amounts, but they must be drinking adequately.
- At home, keep track of your child's oral intake and wet diapers. If you notice a significant decrease in either, your child may be dehydrated. If you are concerned about this, call your pediatrician or your surgeon. Occasionally children need to be readmitted for hydration.

### Swelling

- Your child's head and face will become very swollen after surgery. This swelling gets worse for two days before it slowly starts to get better over two to four days. The eyes should open at the end of this period.
- Once their eyes are open, children are more likely to return to their usual routines of eating, but their sleep cycle may still be off for several weeks.
- Your child's eyes must be opening before you can leave the hospital.
- You may notice that your child is more swollen in the morning after lying down than later in the day.
- If your child's eyes become swollen shut after you have left the hospital, call your surgeon's office.

### Fevers and Infection

- Almost all children have an elevated temperature or fever in the days after surgery. This is the natural result of a big operation, with the body trying to heal, not usually a reflection of infection.
- Infections after this surgery are uncommon.
- When infections do develop it is usually not immediately after surgery, but 10 to 14 days afterwards.
- Signs of infection include:
  - The eyes swelling shut a second time (the initial post operative swelling is normal, but a second episode of swelling two weeks after surgery would be abnormal)
  - Spreading swelling and redness around the incision
  - Milky or foul smelling drainage from the incision
  - Fevers (early post-op fevers are very normal, but should resolve within about 7 days of surgery)
- If you are concerned about infection, please call your surgeon's office.

### Wound Care

- At the time of surgery, your child will have a small plastic drain, called a JP drain, beneath their incision. This prevents fluid from collecting beneath the skin. This is typically removed one or two days after surgery, but

may be left longer if there is a bit more fluid.

- Your child's scalp incision has been repaired with absorbable/dissolving stitches. These do not need to be removed but do need to be kept clean.
- Clean your child's incision with a moist washcloth, soap, and water. Remove developing scabs with your fingernail or the washcloth. You will do more harm by letting these accumulate than by picking them off. A small amount of bleeding after scab removal is expected and not a cause for worry.
- After cleaning, dress the suture line with bacitracin ointment for the first week, then you may switch to plain Vaseline®. The goal is to keep the suture line clean and greasy.

#### Activity & Sleep

- Your child may take several weeks to return to his or her usual routine and sleep patterns.
- Ideally, your child should avoid rough play (with an older sibling for example) for six weeks, but we recognize it is hard to control children of this age.
- Follow all your routine safety measures: car seats, seat belts in high chairs.
- Your surgeon will tell you when your child may return to daycare/school; typically not for four to six weeks.

#### Pain Control

- We typically find that within a day or two after surgery, children do not seem to have much pain.
- Typically, children require codeine for a day or two and then transition to acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- If your child is not drinking well or is irritable, he or she could be in discomfort.
- Keep track of your child's bowel habits. He or she should return to usual bowel habits. If your child does not have a bowel movement every day, he or she may be constipated.
- Prune juice or over the counter laxatives may be helpful. Call your child's doctor or nurse if you think your child is constipated.

#### Emotional Recovery

- After cranial vault remodeling, your child may be tired or irritable, particularly while the eyes are swollen shut. Healing for each child is different.
- In time, your child will return to his or her usual activities.
- It is not uncommon for sleep patterns to be disturbed for up to six weeks after surgery.

#### Follow-up

- Your child will need to return for a follow-up visit in four to 10 days after discharge. Call your child's surgeon at 401-444-2299 to arrange this.
- If your child requires a molding helmet, this should be fitted a week or two after surgery, and will require repeat visits for helmet adjustments.

#### When to Call Your Child's Doctor

Call if:

- Your child has a fever over 101.5°F degrees
- Your child's eyes swell closed a second time
- There is increasing swelling and redness
- If your child is unable to be awakened or aroused