

## Drinking liquids

### Helpful hints for you and your child

Encouraging children to drink can be a challenge when they don't feel well or when swallowing is uncomfortable. Children don't always understand why it is important to drink. Sometimes they control what they eat or drink as a way of coping with the stress of illness or surgery.

When children are sick or recovering from surgery, drinking liquids is very important. If they don't drink enough, they can become dehydrated (dried out), which can be very dangerous. The younger the child, the more quickly this can happen.

#### **If your child is having surgery**

Make sure your child is prepared for surgery. Children who know what to expect tend to cope better with medical procedures and have a faster recovery. The following preparation tips can help promote a positive surgery experience and an easier transition home.

Attend the Pre-Surgery Program with your child to see the surgery area, try out surgery clothes and equipment, and learn more about what to expect. For information about the program, call the Children's site your child is scheduled to visit or log on to Children's Web site, [www.childrensmn.org/surgery](http://www.childrensmn.org/surgery). The Web site also gives information about preparing for surgery, including videos for children, teens, and parents.

Make a special trip to the grocery store with your child to pick out things to eat and drink after surgery. You may want to buy a

special cup of his or her choosing to use after surgery. Check with your surgeon first for the type of food recommended. Liquids are more important than food (especially on the first day), so be sure to have lots of liquids on hand. Some suggested liquids are Popsicles®, Jell-O®, apple and white grape juices, soups, Gatorade®, soda pop, pudding, milk shakes, Kool-aid® (not sugar-free), yogurt, and ice cream.

#### **How can I encourage my child to drink more liquids?**

Below are some ideas for encouraging your child to drink liquids.

##### **Toddlers**

- Offer fluids in small amounts; large amounts can be overwhelming.
- Bring familiar cups from home to use, or a new cup that you bought together.
- Offer support by having family members drink with your child. An older sibling drinking the same liquid can be a wonderful motivator!

##### **Preschool**

- Encourage your child to talk by asking open-ended questions such as, "What book would you like to hear?" Before answering, your child may swallow his or her saliva. The more your child swallows, the easier it becomes.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings, use encouragement, and recognize efforts.

- Offer choices. Choices help children feel more in control so they're less likely to feel the need to control what goes into their mouth.
- Make drinking fun by creating games. For example, have your child make a list of favorite drinks or cut the items out of a grocery ad or magazine. Tape the items on a spinner wheel (make one or use one from a board game). Spin the wheel and have players take a drink of the item the arrow lands on.
- Start serving liquids in small cups (medicine cups, Dixie® cups, etc.). Gradually move up in cup size.
- Put your child's choice of liquid in a syringe to squirt it into his or her mouth.
- Have a tea or Kool-Aid® party with friends and family. Consider inviting a favorite babysitter for a short visit to support your efforts.
- Create a sticker chart together.

### **School-age**

- Discuss with your child the medical reasons why it is important to drink liquids.
- Help your child to be aware of the long-range goal, and together plan the steps needed to reach that goal with dignity and respect.
- Allow your child to help prepare liquids to drink. Experiment with beverages that can be frozen into slushes or fruit pops. With supervision, blenders are a fun way to help prepare drinks.
- Create a new rule while playing a board game that requires players to take a drink before they move their piece.
- Create a sticker chart together.

### **Teens**

- Discuss with your child the medical reasons why it is important to drink liquids.
- Teens can use a blender to experiment with smoothie recipes. They can find recipes online or in cookbooks, or try their own creations.
- As they feel better, arrange to have their friends over to drink and eat with them.

### **Sticker chart ideas**

#### **Preschool**

- Make a chart with about 10 spots to place stickers. Find stickers with a theme that interests your child.
- Decide together what the drinking goal would be to earn a sticker.
- Start out with small amounts as a goal – even a sip – and place the chart near your child to celebrate progress right after drinking.
- When your child completes one chart, you can increase the goal to encourage more drinking.
- Add rewards by having your child earn something after completing a chart or step.
- For preschoolers, the reward works best when it is offered right away because they tend to “live in the moment.”

#### **School-age**

- Have your child help create the chart, goals, and rewards. Children are more motivated and cooperative if they feel they are part of the solution.
- Decide together how much your child needs to drink to earn a sticker.

- Start out with small amounts of liquids.
- Create a “sticker store” for your child with a variety of activities or items. Give each item a different value so that some items could be “purchased” with a few stickers and others would require your child to save stickers.

### What else do I need to know?

Read books and encourage your child to discuss the experience when you get home. The following list of books offers a few suggestions to help your child express thoughts and feelings:

- *My Many Colored Days*, by Dr. Seuss
- *Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods That Make My Days*, by Jamie Lee Curtis
- *Hooray for You: A Celebration of You-ness*, by Mariann Richmond
- *I Like Me*, by Nancy L. Carlson

### Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have questions about your child’s medical care or whether your child is drinking enough, please contact your doctor.

To learn more about helping your child drink liquids, call the child life department. Child life specialists are trained to help children understand and cope with medical procedures and can offer parents advice on how to talk with and support their children. There is no charge for child life services.

Children’s - Minneapolis	(612) 813-6259
Children’s - St. Paul	(651) 220-6465
Children’s West	(952) 930-8773

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: [www.childrensmn.org](http://www.childrensmn.org).

Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota  
 Patient/Family Education  
 2525 Chicago Avenue South  
 Minneapolis, MN 55404  
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