

## Cardiac surgery: Care at home

### Wound Care

Your child may take a shower or sponge bath. Avoid very hot water. Do not soak (such as swimming or bathing) for 3-4 weeks after surgery. Do not put creams or ointments on your child's wound.

Allow Steri-Strips to fall off on their own. There are stitches at the top and bottom of the incision. The cardiologist will remove these prior to going home from the hospital or at the first clinic visit.

The chest tube sites may have a small amount of drainage for up to 2 weeks after surgery. Apply a new bandage every morning and evening until the drainage stops. Follow the cardiologist's instructions for care of these sites.

### Activity

Check with the cardiologist about specific activity limits.

If your surgery involved an incision over the breastbone, it will heal best if is not bumped or injured in any way. **Do not allow** the use of riding or climbing toys for at least 4-6 weeks. This includes the use of bicycles, tricycles, swings, playground and scooting toys. Check with your provider before allowing your child to take part in sports and gym class.

### Rest Periods

A balance of both activity and rest periods is important when recovering from cardiac surgery. Some children may decrease their activities on their own, but others need more supervision and reminders to take it easy for a while. Encourage naps to promote healing.

### Lifting

Infants and small children need to be lifted by "scooping" (supporting the neck and shoulders and lifting under the buttocks). Continue to lift this way for 4 weeks after surgery to avoid stress on the incision.

Your child should avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling anything heavier than 10 pounds (such as a gallon of milk) for 6 weeks after surgery. This includes mowing the lawn, or walking the dog.

### When can my child return to school or daycare?

Your provider will tell you when your child can return to school or daycare. Talk with your child's teacher and the school nurse about any restrictions because of the surgery. Let them know your child should be treated as normally as possible. If needed, the cardiologist can send a letter to the school listing any activity limits.

### What else do I need to know?

#### Dental Care

People with heart problems may be more likely to get endocarditis (heart infection) after routine dental care or some types of surgery. This can occur when bacteria that are normally found in the mouth enter the bloodstream and travel to the heart.

The risk of endocarditis is reduced with good dental care. Brush their teeth at least twice a day. Clean your infant's teeth with a washcloth wrapped around your finger.

Your child should begin seeing a dentist between 2-3 years of age to keep the mouth healthy. Tell your dentist about your child's heart condition. For dental procedures and some surgeries, an antibiotic may be needed before and after the appointment. Check with your cardiologist if you have questions about the need for antibiotics. **No dental procedures should be done for at least 6 weeks after surgery.**

### **Behavioral**

Your child may be moody or irritable after surgery or hospital stays. If you become concerned, call your pediatrician.

Toddlers and preschoolers may go back to earlier behaviors in areas such as toilet training and independence, and may have more separation anxiety for a while. They should regain these skills after some time.

Toddlers and preschoolers may have nightmares for a short time. Reassure and comfort them to help them go back to sleep.

### **When should I call the cardiologist?**

- pain that is not relieved with prescribed medicines
- repeated vomiting
- not urinating at least every 8 hours
- breathing faster or harder
- poor appetite
- unusual cough
- pale or bluish color
- temperature higher than 101°F
- increasing swelling, redness, or warmth at the incision or the area around it
- drainage from the incision
- incision is not healing

### **What resources are available?**

**“Parents for Heart”** is a support group for parents of children with heart problems. Call 612-813-6645, or visit [www.parentsforheart.org](http://www.parentsforheart.org).

**The Children's Heart Clinic** has information about congenital heart disease on their website: [www.childrensheartclinic.org](http://www.childrensheartclinic.org)

**Meld Special** is a free Twin Cities program that offers information and support for parents of children with chronic conditions. The phone number is 612-332-7563.

**PACER Center Inc.** (612-827-2966) is a resource for parents of children with disabilities.

You may qualify for **financial help** because of your heart condition. Children's social work staff can help you find out what financial resources are available. The nurse can help you contact them at your request.

### **Questions?**

This sheet is not specific to you, but provides general information. If you have any questions, call the cardiologist.

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).