

Therapy advice for children with complex needs having spinal surgery

Information for
parents and carers



Spinal surgery

Your child has been listed for spinal surgery following discussion with their Spinal Team.

This leaflet will explain the kind of therapy you can expect your child to have after their operation, to help them recover as quickly as possible.

What to expect when your child comes to hospital for their surgery

Operation day: (Day zero)

You will need to bring your child to hospital on the morning of their surgery. Please go to the ward that is detailed in their admission letter. After your child has had their surgery, they will be transferred to the Paediatric High Dependency Unit (PHDU) or Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) where they will meet their named nurse.

Day after operation: (Day one)

Your child will be visited by the Orthopaedic Therapy team, who will support their rehabilitation and recovery after their surgery.

If appropriate, they will be seen by the Physiotherapist, who will check their breathing; they may listen to their chest and discuss any breathing techniques your child was using before the operation.

They will give you and your child advice and techniques to help them to breathe more comfortably. It is very important that you encourage your child to follow any advice that they are given, as this can help prevent respiratory complications, such as chest infections.

The Occupational Therapist will review rolling, repositioning and personal care with the nurses looking after your child. The nurses will help them to roll regularly and change position so that they are comfortable. If your child is comfortable, we can complete a hoist over the bed.

The rehabilitation and recovery journey during admission is specific to your child and their needs. The Orthopaedic Therapy Team will visit you and your child on the ward.

Transfers and mobility

- If your child normally transfers independently or with assistance, the Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists will assess and review to ensure that your child is safely able to transfer, and that you know how to support if required.
- If your child is hoisted, or if you currently lift your child for transfers, Occupational Therapists will complete an initial hoist above the bed, and then out into the wheelchair. Over the course of the admission, you will be encouraged to practice hoisting your child between bed and chair with support from the Therapists and ward staff.
- Occupational Therapists will make minor adjustments to your child's wheelchair if required; they will also liaise with Wheelchair Services and the Physiotherapists may go through bed and/or chair based exercises with you and your child.

Preparation for discharge

- Occupational Therapists will advise on, and practice, personal care including washing, dressing, toileting/pad changes.
- Please ensure that you have contact details for any professionals that support you and your child in the community, as the Therapists will send a handover on discharge.
- If your child has carers at home, they are welcome to come in for manual handling training or you can take photos or videos.
- Generally, we aim for children to be able to comfortably sit in their wheelchair for long enough to facilitate the journey home.

Return to school

- After surgery, your child will need a period of time off school – the length of time will depend on the individual child and the school context.
- Generally, we recommend a phased return to school – gradually building up to full time.
- Your child will need to be able to comfortably complete the journey to and from school, in addition to the time at school.
- Factors to consider include the equipment and set-up at school – whether your child has alternative seating, or is able to lie down during the day.
- We encourage your child to start their return to school as soon as they are able to, as it can be a good distraction from any discomfort during their recovery.
- Occupational Therapy can liaise with school regarding positioning and manual handling if required.

Going home

A plan to discharged your child from hospital will be arrange when the Therapists and medical team feel your child is well enough, and when you and the Therapy Team are confident that you can maintain post-operative spinal precautions when hoisting and caring for them.

You will be encouraged to practice hoisting your child out of bed and into their wheelchair regularly whilst they are in hospital. This will help them to build up their tolerance of sitting in their wheelchair.

Discharge goal: To be able to sit in their wheelchair for a set period of time, as discussed with the Therapists. This is likely to be at least the length of time needed for you to be able to travel home from the hospital.

The Occupational Therapist will give you advice on how to carry out washing, dressing and personal care with your child after their surgery. If you need any extra support at home, the Occupational Therapist can discuss this with the relevant teams in your area.

The Occupational Therapist will work with your child's local wheelchair service to arrange a review of their wheelchair. During this time, your child may be loaned a wheelchair from the Oxford Children's Hospital. You will need to return this to the Oxford Children's Hospital, once your child's own wheelchair has been adjusted.

General advice to help with returning to school/college:

Your child may find that they are more tired than usual while they are recovering from their surgery. They may wish to make a graded return to school, for example, starting with a half day and gradually increasing the time spent at school back to full days. We encourage your child to return to school as soon as they feel strong enough, as it can be a good distraction from any discomfort during their recovery.

Please speak to your child's teacher/tutor to ask if they can sit in a position in class where they can face straight forward and do not need to look over their shoulder or twist their spine.

Things to bring

- Contact details for your child's community teams.
- Loose, comfortable clothes.
- Wheelchair and sling.
- Any portable respiratory equipment or medical devices.
- Games, books, tablet or sensory comfort items that your child likes.
- Specialist cutlery or cups/bottles.
- Hospital passport.

Contact

If you, your child or their school or college have any specific questions about their recovery after surgery, please feel free to contact the Paediatric Therapy Department at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital.

Telephone: **01865 231 999** or **01865 234 001**
(8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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This leaflet was produced by the Paediatric Orthopaedic Team
and Paediatric Neuromuscular Team

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