

How to help your child understand and prepare for surgery

Introducing your child to the idea of surgery can be difficult. What should you say? What shouldn't you say? Fortunately, there are ways you can prepare yourself and your child for this very important day, while setting both of your minds at ease.

Help your child know what to expect

Children of different ages will have different needs when preparing for surgery. Knowing how to prepare your child will help you both feel more relaxed and prepared the closer you come to the big day. With these tips, you and your little one can conquer this together!

For children up to age 4:

- Begin to prepare them one to two days before surgery.
- Remember to relax as much as possible — children can sense tension in your body and will respond to it.
- Read hospital-related books to introduce them to the topic of surgery.
- Engage in play to explain how a doctor and patient relationship works.

For children 4 through 12:

- Start preparing them as early as one or two weeks before surgery.
- Reassure them that you will be there when they wake up.
- Be honest with your child, answering their questions without hiding the truth.
- Encourage them to choose a comfort item from home to bring to the hospital.

For children 13 and older:

- Begin to prepare your teenager at least a week before surgery.
- Explain that their surgery will help them to get better and that it's OK to be scared and to cry.
- Books and online resources, such as KidsHealth.org, are great tools you can use.
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Then answer those questions honestly, and allow them as much independence and privacy as they need leading up to surgery.

For the **sibling of a child who is having surgery**, they may feel confused, scared, guilty or even jealous. These feelings are normal. You can prepare them for their sibling's surgery by:

- Involving them in any readings, discussions and play related to surgery
- Being honest in answering questions and resisting the urge to say things that aren't true to protect them, no matter their age

When talking to your child about their surgery, knowing what to say is important — but equally important is **knowing what not to say**. For example, don't say "The doctor will put you to sleep." Instead, say "The doctor will give you medicine to help you sleep until the surgery is over."

Depending on the type of surgery, you can reassure them that the doctor will "make a small opening, about the size of a dime" (or other familiar object). Saying things like "cut" or "open you up" may scare your child.

Using familiar references and learning materials will help them learn about their surgery while putting their mind at ease.

Our brain coloring sheet will help your child learn more about their brain and its functions!



Dr. Shimony, pediatric neurosurgeon



Nir Shimony, MD, is a fellowship-trained and board-certified pediatric neurosurgeon at Geisinger.

Fun fact about Dr. Shimony:
He speaks English and Hebrew.

Dr. Shimony is experienced in treating:

- Craniosynostosis
- Brain tumors
- Spine tumors
- Chiari malformations
- Hydrocephalus

Dr. Shimony sees patients at four convenient locations:

Geisinger Medical Center*

100 N. Academy Ave.
Danville, PA 17822
570-271-6211

Geisinger Pediatrics Forty Fort

190 Welles St., Suite 122
Forty Fort, PA 18704
570-718-4140

Geisinger Pediatric Specialty Dunmore

1000 Meade St., Suite 204
Dunmore, PA 18512
570-703-2123

Geisinger Gray's Woods

132 Abigail Lane
Port Matilda, PA 16870
800-230-4565

Geisinger

**All surgeries are performed at Geisinger Medical Center.*

Brain coloring sheet

Color your way through the brain and learn about the different parts!



Frontal lobe

The front of your brain helps you make decisions, like what to eat for breakfast, and remember things.

Parietal lobe

This part of your brain helps you understand tastes, temperatures and feelings.

Occipital lobe

Helps you to understand what your eyes are seeing.

Cerebellum

This part of your brain helps your muscles know when to move and helps with balance.

Brain stem

Controls your involuntary muscles and acts as the brain's secretary, translating messages to and from the body.

Temporal lobe

This part of your brain helps with memory, language and understanding.

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