Caring for Your Child after Heart Surgery
Caring for the incision (surgical cut)

Healing of incisions will take about three days.

If your child has had open heart surgery, the breastbone (sternum) was divided. It is now stitched together with stainless steel wires. Healing will take up to six weeks.

**Bathing**

- Wash the incision daily with mild soap and water. Pat it dry.
- Showers and sponge baths are fine.
- Do not soak the incision until it is healed. No swimming. Use shallow bath water for infants.
- Keep the incision clean and dry. Be sure to dry under your child’s chin after feedings.

**Skin care**

- Do not use any creams or lotions on the area for six weeks.
- As the skin heals, it is very sensitive to the sun. Protect your child’s skin with clothing or sun block (SPF 30 or higher).

**Stitches**

- The body will absorb the stitches. You may see small pieces of the stitches come through the skin. This is normal.
- The body will absorb the stitch at the site of the chest tube. The knot will fall off.
Infection

Call the Heart Center (612-625-5133) if you see any of these signs:

- Increase in redness.
- Increase in swelling.
- Drainage (leaking fluid).
- Increase in pain.
- Open areas.
- Fever above 100.5°F (38°C).

Lifting your child

While your child is healing, pick up your child with care. Do not pick the child up under the arms. Instead, support the head and neck with one hand and support the lower body and bottom with the other hand. Then lift.

Diet

Children heal faster with a good diet. Provide meals with plenty of protein (meat, fish, cheese, eggs), calcium (milk, yogurt), veggies and fruit.

Your baby may need a high-calorie formula or breast-milk supplement. If so, we will give you a recipe before going home. Limit feedings to 30 minutes, so your baby does not get too tired.
Activity

Let your child do what he or she is able. Children will limit themselves if they need to.

**For six weeks:** Avoid activities that could cause the child to fall or get hit hard in the chest. After six weeks, your child may return to normal activity.

*Toddlers and preschoolers should not:*

- Swim or climb.
- Fall or jump from a height.
- Ride tricycles or riding toys.
- Roller-skate or roller-blade.
- Play contact sports.
- Lift their own weight with their arms. For example, your child should not hang from monkey bars.
- Lift more than 5 to 10 pounds.

*School-age kids and teens should not:*

- Play contact sports such as baseball or football.
- Ride a bike, roller-blade or use a skate board.
- Swim or climb.
- Lift more than 10 pounds, including backpacks or heavy books.
Recovery

A mild fever (less than 100.5°F or 38°C) is normal in the first week. After the first week, steady pain should end. There may be short periods of chest discomfort for several months.

Call the Heart Center (612-625-5133) or your heart doctor if your child has any of these symptoms:

• Fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C).

• Breathing becomes faster or harder, or you see the ribs as your child draws a breath.

• Heavy sweating.

• Drinking less fluid. For infants, call if they cannot drink a bottle for two feedings in a row.

• Puffy eyes or face.

• Feeling very grouchy or sleepy.

• Skin has a pale blue color.

• Vomiting (throwing up) or diarrhea (loose stools).

• Less able to exercise.

• Incision has redness, swelling or drainage (leaking fluid).
Giving medicines

Some children will need medicines after surgery. Practice giving medicines to your child before going home. This way, you’ll feel sure that you can give them safely.

• When you give medicine to your child:
  – Check the label to be sure you have the right medicine.
  – Know if the medicine is taken with or without food.
  – Know the correct dose and when to give it.
  – Never skip a dose.

• Store medicine away from heat, light and moisture. Keep out of the reach of children and pets.

• Note the date it expires (sometimes called the “use-by” date).

• Get refills before you run out of medicine. Try to use the same pharmacy for refills.

• Tell your doctor about any side effects your child has.

• Carry a list of your child’s current medicines. If you use a medication card, keep it up to date.

• Bring all of your child’s medicines to each clinic and hospital visit. This includes vitamins, over-the-counter drugs and herbs.
Types of medicines

**Water pills (diuretics):**

- Help rid the body of excess fluid, so the heart pumps with less work.
- Make breathing easier.

These pills lower potassium. If your child takes this medicine, give your child high-potassium foods such as oranges, bananas and milk.

Some children need to take a diuretic for a long time. For others, your doctor may stop it several weeks after surgery.

**Examples:** Lasix (furosemide), Aldactone (spironolactone)

**Blood pressure medicine:**

- Lowers blood pressure.
- Relaxes the blood vessels and makes it easier for the heart to pump.

Give this medicine on an empty stomach. If your child misses a dose or throws (vomits) it up, do not give a second dose.

**Generic names:** captopril, enalapril, lisinopril

**Digoxin:**

- Strengthens the pumping of the heart.
- Helps control the heart rate and rhythm.
Measure this medicine with the dropper that comes with the bottle. Do not use a syringe.

If your child misses a dose or throws (vomits) it up, do not give a second dose.

Your doctor may stop this medicine several months after surgery.

**Brand name:** Lanoxin

**School and daycare**

Children can usually return to school or daycare one to two weeks after they come home. Your child may adjust better by going half days during the first week.

Tell the teacher and school nurse about your child’s surgery and limits on activity. The school may ask for a doctor’s letter that states your child’s limits. You may use the letter at the back of this booklet. A member of the care team will fill it out before your child goes home.
Getting shots (vaccinations)

Before having any shots, wait two weeks after your child leaves the hospital. Your child should receive:

- The usual schedule of childhood shots.
- Shots for the flu and pneumonia.
- If needed, a shot to prevent RSV (a serious virus in the lungs). Your heart doctor will tell you if your child needs this shot. If so, you do not need to wait two weeks to get the RSV shot.

If your child has immunity problems or a heart transplant, talk to your doctor before getting any shots.

Dental care

Wait eight weeks after surgery for all dental care. This includes teeth cleaning.

If your child must see the dentist right away, call our office. Dental work puts your child at risk for a blood infection. We will give your child an antibiotic (germ-killing medicine) to take before going to the dentist.

Bacterial endocarditis (BE)

BE is an infection caused by bacteria that enter the blood stream. It can infect the heart lining, a heart valve or a blood vessel. Talk to your child’s doctor about the risk for BE and how to prevent it. To learn more, go to the American Heart Association website at www.americanheart.org.
To Whom It May Concern:

______________________________ has had cardiac surgery on _____________ (date) at the University of Minnesota Masonic Children’s Hospital to correct a congenital heart defect. The following restrictions should be followed post-surgery:

• May return to school on or about ____________________.

• May attend school half days for the first week until stamina returns.

• May do school work at home as able before returning to class.

• No physical education classes for six weeks post-surgery.

• No activities with possible fall or trauma to chest for six weeks post surgery. This includes biking, skating, rough play, playground equipment, swimming, basketball, football.

• No contact sports for six weeks post-surgery.

• No lifting more than 10 pounds for six weeks post-surgery.

Please provide an extra set of textbooks to be kept at home to reduce the weight of a backpack.

Other: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Thank you for assisting in this child’s recovery.

Please contact the Pediatric Cardiology Office at 612-626-2755 if you have any questions.