

Tips to Help Your Teen Cope with Surgery

Adolescents are becoming independent, and generally cope best when they are informed about what they can expect. They often require detailed explanations of their surgery. Being open and honest when talking to your teen about their surgery will foster a trusting relationship. Parents and teens can work together as partners to seek out information and make health care decisions. If they become upset, take this opportunity to help identify ways they can cope. Focus on what they will see, feel, and hear, and try to use non-threatening words to describe what will happen while they are asleep.

Teenagers may find the following concerning:

- The surgery and its risks
- Privacy
- Body image and changes to their bodies
- Relationships with friends / feeling different from their friends
- Loss of control
- Anesthesia (will they wake up after their surgery)

Preparing your teenager for surgery:

- If they ask, inform teens about what will happen to their body by providing clear, straightforward explanations.
- Explain how the surgery may affect their daily activities, interactions with peers and any potential lifestyle changes.
- It is important to acknowledge your teen's concerns about changes to their appearance.
- Encourage your teen to be involved by asking their medical team questions. It may be helpful for them to prepare a list of questions ahead of time.
- Reassure your teen that the hospital staff will respect their privacy and that the staff will keep them covered as much as possible during their surgery.
- Although teens are becoming independent, they still need your support. Encourage your teen to express any feelings. Reassure them that fear, anger, and tears are normal.
- Encourage your teen to bring some comfort items from home, books, music, iPad, head phones.
- Help your teen develop a plan to cope with what makes him or her feel anxious. Support them to practice the plan prior to the surgery. Coping strategies may include deep breathing and listening to music as a distraction.
- Prepare the teen for needing your help more than usual. Let them know that they may require help walking, bathing, eating, or toileting for the first little while after surgery.
- Although we do our best to run on time, plan for long waits.
- Please do not hesitate to ask questions or explain to staff what helps your teen.