



Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Every hospital is different. For help in determining what is acceptable and what is not, contact your individual hospital or health center prior to any planned overnight stay. Be sure to ask about the hospital's overnight stay policies for parents.

If there is anything that is not discussed in our newsletters and you would like to see it discussed, or you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please contact us at snrproject@hotmail.com



Getting Ready For A Hospital Stay: A Parent's Perspective

By Linda Jorgensen

You've been told your child needs surgery or will be checking into a hospital for a lengthy stay. There are many resources for parents to use in preparing their children for a hospital stay but precious little has been written for the parent. No "Parent Prep" tours by parent friendly specialists, no classes to attend with teddy bears and blankets in tow. The main focus is on your child and their upcoming hospital experience, as it should be. But where does that leave the Parent?

Hospital stays are very disruptive to family life. Routines must be maintained at home for those remaining behind while a routine of sorts must be developed for the child staying in the hospital. With all the cares and procedures that need to be done this is an almost insurmountable task, leaving most parents frazzled and exhausted. Parents, who are calmer, fairly rested, and in control of most of what is happening, will make the entire situation easier for both themselves and their child.

Over the years we have gathered a few tips that will help you, the Parent, have an easier stay with your child while maintaining "life as usual" at home.

Here is a list of our favorite comfort tips for parents, to make a hospital stay easier for the entire family.

Before the Procedure: At the Hospital

- Attend any Pre-hospitalization classes offered for your child, with your child. Pay close attention to the facility itself. Ask the person presenting the class about your expected role as the parent. Many facilities include a section for the parent in these classes but many do not. ASK QUESTIONS! If you're touring a hospital room, ask what arrangements are made for parents spending the night. Where will YOU sleep? Where will you eat? What are visitor policies?
- Locate the parent's waiting room and the recovery area.
- Locate the nearest phone or find out the hospital policy on cell-phone use. Many facilities now use the parent's cell phone as an easy way to locate them within the building. Find out what your local facility's policy is.
- Find the parent Education Center, if the facility has one. If not, who is your contact at the hospital if you need help? Do they have a Parent Educator? Where are they located in the building?
- Find out about computer use or access by private laptop. Can you bring one from home?
- Most importantly, find out where the Cafeteria is and what are their hours and serving policies are.

Before the Procedure: At Home

- Arrange for time off work or a more flexible schedule. Will you be trading off time with your spouse and other close family members or spending the entire time at the hospital yourself?
- Line up people you trust to stay with other children at home.
- Line up family and friends who can help with car pools, soccer practices, etc.
- Line up over night stays with friends and family for your other children if needed.
- Grocery shop.
- Meal plan ahead of time. Prepare extra meals for the freezer or purchase some favorite family short cuts. Frozen lasagna, a bag of salad greens and a loaf of French bread make an easy meal for family at home.
- Use paper plates, cups and plastic utensils for fast and easy clean up after meals.
- Teach your children how to help with the laundry.
- Be sure to spend a little one-on-one time with each of your other children every day. They will often be as concerned and nervous as the child going to the hospital. Ensure your other children do not feel left out.
- Try to stick to family routines. Take a few minutes and write those daily routines down for others who may be assisting in taking care of your family while you are at the hospital.
- Educate yourself about what your child will be doing at the hospital so you have a basic understanding of what will be going on. Ask your child's physician, hospital staff and others who may be familiar with your child and their medical condition. Be as prepared as you can be.

Here are a few of our time-tested comfort tips for parent's staying at the hospital with their child.

During Your Stay at Hospital

- If you plan on spending the night take a small air mattress and a sleeping bag for sleeping. It has been our experience that an air mattress on the floor is much more comfortable than a recliner or any well-worn rollaway. Take your own pillow. Be sure to label your items.
- Bring a change of clothing, a small toiletries bag and a towel for showering. Include a pair of

sweats for sleeping in as you may be getting up and down during the night.

- **Be sure to bring your own medications, should you need them. Keep them secure on your person!**
- You may also wish to bring your laptop (if allowed by the facility), your cell phone and a small amount of cash for the cafeteria. Keep these items with you at all times.
- Bring something to do. A book, letter writing paper, a magazine or some needlework to keep your hands busy. You may also bring DVD from home for viewing if properly labeled and allowed by the hospital. We fill a tote bag with items we can keep handy.
- Bring a labeled water bottle and maintain hydration. Keep it in your tote.
- **SLEEP WHEN YOUR CHILD IS ASLEEP**, if possible. Make sure you get as much rest as you can.
- **Take breaks from staying with your child periodically.** Trade off with a spouse, a family member or a friend who is willing to give you a break. Take a walk, go home and see the rest of the children, etc. Be sure to take a break. A rested, calmer parent will help make their child feel calmer and more rested as well.
- Get to know the nursing staff. Your child's nurse is your first person contact. Be polite and try to stay out of their way when possible. You may also ask her/him questions about your child's care, have them explain procedures and answer any other questions you may have. They can also help you navigate through the hospital. Your child's nurse can be you best ally or your worst enemy. Better to be on friendly terms.
- Eat properly and on schedule. **DO NOT SKIP MEALS!** Take proper care of your self.

It is important for parents to realize they can ask for help when they need it. No parent has to do everything by him or herself. Rely on staff for medical questions, ask family and friends for help and above all be sure to maintain constant communication with your spouse. Trust your instincts and use your resources. With some prior planning and preparation your child's hospital stay can be made more comfortable and easier for everyone. Including Mom and Dad.