Acute Post-Operative Pain

After your child is discharged from hospital following an operation, it is very likely that he will have some pain that will need management at home. Post-operative pain tends to be strongest at first after the surgery and lessens over time as tissues heal. As with all types of pain, post-operative pain is treated with some combination of pain relieving medicines, physical and psychological strategies.

Your child will not be discharged from hospital until the doctors and nurses are confident that you can manage the pain at home. You will be given instructions on how to assess your child’s pain, how and when to administer the medications, when to seek help, and overall, how best to manage his recovery.

Giving pain medicines

Children recovering from surgery are usually prescribed one or more medications that are to be taken on a regular basis or as needed. If your child’s pain is present most of the day, then the medications should be given at regular intervals, for example every four to six hours. If medicines are given every four hours during the day and night, this is called "around the clock" dosing. This strategy will include waking your child at night to take pain medicines. Although this may not seem sensible, when medication is given on a regular basis, your child will be more mobile, use less medication overall, and recover more quickly. Waiting for your child to experience pain or be awoken by pain before giving medication usually leads to the opposite effect. He will have less mobility, need more medication overall, and experience a slower recovery.

More than one medicine for controlling pain may be used because each relieves pain in a different way. Your child’s nurse or pharmacist will provide information on how and when to take particular medicines and how to manage their side effects. If you do not receive this information, it is important to ask about it.

You may need to contact a health care professional about your child’s pain after he has returned home. It is important to ask who is to be contacted and how to contact them before you leave the hospital. Although you are providing the care for your child at home, the staff at the hospital can provide further advice if needed. Knowing how much pain your child is expected to have during the recovery period will give you an idea of how much help or advice you might need.

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