

HEART SURGERY AFTERCARE



Your child or youth and family have been through a lot, preparing for and coping with your child or youth's heart (cardiac) surgery. Now that the surgery is over, your child will be sent home to recover and will need your support to care for their incision (the cut made during surgery) and monitor their activity levels.

How do I take care of my child's incision?

Your child's incision will keep healing for 12 months after surgery. It will slowly fade from red to white. You may notice a little clear or yellow fluid from the incision or chest tube site – this is normal and nothing to worry about. Apply a dry band-aid or loosely tape gauze to it to prevent fluid from leaking onto your child's clothes.



✓ Incision care do's

- keep the incision dry for the first five days after surgery – after five days they can have short (five minute or less) baths or showers
- during a bath, wash the incision gently with soap and water and pat dry
- use mild soap that is free from perfumes and dyes
- protect the incision from the sun with a t-shirt – after six weeks, sunscreen is OK on the incision

X Incision care don't's

- don't let the incision soak for more than five minutes (for about three weeks)
- do not use lotions, ointments or creams (including sunscreen) on the incision for six weeks

Stitches

Incisions are often closed with stitches. Do not cut, pull or remove the stitches yourself. The stitches:

- will be taken out at your first clinic visit (about 1 week after discharge)
- may be covered with light gauze bandage. This helps to prevent your child from scratching, or stops the stitches from getting caught on clothing.



Wound closure strips (Steri-Strips®)

Incisions are sometimes covered on the outside with wound closure strips made out of special tape called Steri-Strips®:

- they will slowly begin to dry and fall off – don't peel them off, let them fall off on their own
- if the edges of the strips curl up, you can trim the edges with scissors if this is bothering you

How long will it take for the sternum (breastbone) to heal?

The sternum (breastbone) will need six weeks to heal. To protect the sternum while it is healing, your child or youth cannot take part in activities that can cause a fall or injury to the chest or require heavy use of the arms.

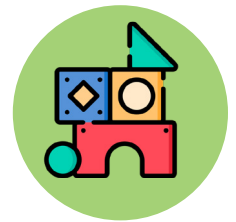
While the sternum is healing:

- do not pick your child up under their arms (this puts strain on the sternum) – instead, lift them by ‘scooping’ them with your arm under their bottom and your hand on the back of their neck
- keep your child home from school or daycare to prevent your child from getting bumped or pushed by other children – make arrangements with their school so they can keep up with school work at home
- don't let your child wear a backpack as this puts strain on the sternum
- ensure your child or youth uses the correct car seat, booster seat or seat belt for their size at all times

Activity guidelines (six weeks after surgery)

✓ Your child can take part in light activities including:

- walking
- playing on the floor with toys
- reading
- watching TV
- ‘tummy time’ for babies
- brushing hair and teeth
- getting dressed
- tidying their room



X Your child must not take part in the following for six weeks:

- contact sports
- skating
- bike riding
- gym class at school
- rough play
- shovelling
- running
- gymnastics
- push-ups
- tennis
- soccer
- hockey
- baseball
- lifting anything heavier than five pounds

Behaviour changes to watch for

Many children have changes in their behaviour after heart surgery. If your child or youth is not back to their usual self in 3-4 weeks, call your family doctor.

Signs to watch for in young children

- seem clingy
- wet the bed
- have nightmares
- be angry with parents

Signs to watch for in older children:

- need more attention
- not want to be left alone

Contact CHEO if your child or youth:

- develops a new pain, or pain gets suddenly worse
- gets a fever
- has redness or drainage from the incisions
- has changes in breathing pattern
- is not eating well
- starts vomiting
- is always irritable
- complains of feeling weak and tired
- if you are worried about something or have questions

Contact information**Cardiovascular nurse**

General questions or concerns

Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

613-737-7600 ext. 3639

Cardiovascular surgeon on call

Urgent requests on weekends, evenings and holidays

1. Call 613-737-7600
2. Press "0" for the operator
3. Ask the operator to page the cardiovascular surgeon on-call. Please don't hang up. It can sometimes take 5-10 minutes for the surgeon to reach the operator.

Health and dental care after heart surgery**Wait six weeks for:**

- other elective surgeries
- dental visits – your doctor will tell you if your child needs antibiotics for dental visits

**Wait 7-9 months for:**

- immunizations that are live vaccines (RSV immunizations are OK)

Bring your child to the closest Emergency Department if:

- your child is having trouble breathing
- your child's skin colour changes (becomes gray or blue looking)
- you have any other concerns and are unable to reach cardiovascular surgery staff



Need information? Visit cheo.on.ca

Use our handy search tool to find CHEO-approved health resources, clinic information and much, much more!

What can we help you find?



Have you registered for MyChart?

MyChart is a **FREE** secure, online patient portal that connects patients to parts of their CHEO electronic health record, anywhere, at any time.

To apply for MyChart access, visit cheo.on.ca/mychart and fill out the MyChart access request form. Once your application has been approved, we'll send you an email with an activation code and instructions on how to

