



**Children  
In Hospital**  
Ireland (CIH)

# What to expect if your child is going to hospital

**A guide to help you prepare for your child's hospital admission**

This guide has lots of useful information to help you prepare for your baby or child going to hospital.

You can also contact the Children In Hospital team who can help you understand this information.



**The Guide to Hospital Admissions was created in partnership with the Children In Hospital Ireland Parent Advisory Group.**

**We are sincerely grateful to the members for so generously sharing their experience and time in designing this guide.**



## **Getting ready for hospital**

Information to help you plan for getting to hospital, staying overnight and what to pack and preparing your child for hospital.



## **What to expect in hospital**

Information to help you know what to expect when you arrive and on the ward, the daily routine and supports and activities for your child.



## **Having an operation**

Information to help you know what to expect if your child is having an operation.



## **Going home**

Advice and a discharge checklist to help you prepare for going home from hospital..



## **More important information**

- Advocating for your child
- Supporting siblings
- Where to find more information
- Notes






# 1

# Getting ready for hospital

## Getting to the hospital and parking

Planning early for getting to the hospital and knowing where to park can reduce a lot of the stress on the day your child is admitted to hospital.

Read our getting ready tips before you go!

-  Make sure to leave plenty of time for delays while travelling and parking.
-  Hospital car parks can be very busy or full – you might have to wait for a space or use local parking instead. Maybe one person can drop you and your child off at the hospital entrance and then park.
-  Some car parks only take coins or need an app on a phone. Call the hospital or check our online InformationHub before you go.
-  There can be lots of walking in a hospital – a stroller can be useful.
-  If your child will be in hospital for longer than 7 days, make sure to ask if there is a long term parking rate

### Need help getting to hospital?



**BUMBLEance may be able to provide your travel to and from the hospital. As Ireland's Children's Ambulance Service, they offer FREE transport to any child receiving medical care in Ireland. Visit [bumbleance.com](http://bumbleance.com)**

# Staying overnight with your child

## Staying in the hospital

Most hospitals allow a parent to stay with their child at night on a recliner or parent bed in the ward. This is not always possible in the Intensive Care Unit (PICU/NICU) but a nearby area to rest is usually available.

The children's hospitals in Dublin also have parent accommodation rooms.

## Accommodation provided by charities

These are some of the of the charities that provide accommodation for families who must travel to hospital. A referral from a hospital social worker or ward manager is usually required. There is often a waiting list so try to request a room as soon as you know the dates your child will be in hospital.



**Ronald McDonald House – CHI at Crumlin**



**Hugh's House – CHI at Temple Street, Rotunda, Coombes and Holles Street**



**Brú Columbanus – Cork city hospitals**

The hospital or ward staff or condition specific charities may have information about other accommodation options.

## Where do parents eat?

You usually have to provide your own meals while your child is in hospital. Ask if a parent kitchen is available to use or if any meals are provided. Most hospitals provide meals or vouchers for breastfeeding mothers.

There are also usually hospital canteens or restaurants.

# Packing for you and your child

What you need to pack will be different for every child, length of stay in hospital and how far you are from home.

Our packing lists will give you ideas of things you might need to pack.

## Items to bring to all hospital admissions:

- Admission letter from the hospital
- Medical history or health passport for long-term conditions, if you have one for your child
- Any medication your child is taking and a list from your doctor or pharmacy of their medications and the dosage
- Medical card and/or private Insurance details
- Details of your local chemist in case a prescription will need to be collected when you return home
- Details for your family doctor - they will be sent details after your child's hospital stay
- Your child's immunisation record
- Your child's favourite item for comfort or distraction - favourite teddy, blankie, I-pad etc



### Important Tip!

Make sure you read the information the hospital has provided about the hospital admission such as things you need to tell the staff, fasting or calling to confirm the day before admission.

## Packing ideas for your baby or child

- A favourite teddy or blanket or soother
- Slippers or other closed toe shoes
- Light daytime clothes
- A few sets of pyjamas or onesies
- Underwear or nappies, wipes and barrier cream or talc
- A toothbrush and toothpaste
- Soap and a facecloth
- A favourite bottle or sippy cup your child likes
- Small, wipeable, toys or games
- Assistive devices or communication tools your child uses - don't forget the charger!
- Formula or a breast-pump, if needed - these can be available on the ward so make sure to ask.

### Top Tip!

Ask your child to help pack for hospital - let them choose some of their favourite items to bring.



## Packing ideas for parents/carers

You may not need all of these items if your child is only in hospital for a short stay.

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, shampoo and towel and any other personal care or feminine hygiene items you might need
- Lip balm – it can get very dry on the ward
- Comfortable shoes & light, daytime and overnight clothes
- Your phone and charger
- A notebook and pen
- Ear plugs - it can be noisy on the ward at night.
- Reusable water bottle or coffee cup
- Ear or head phones - Be considerate of others - don't make noise at night.
- Bring something to pass the time other than your phone - like a book, knitting or a puzzle



### Parent Tip!

*"I think of it like packing my bag for a long drive - everything you think you might need over a long stretch of time"*

# Preparing your child before going to hospital

It is important to prepare children of all ages for going to hospital. Our tips below will help you talk to your child about what to expect.

## Find out what to expect

Try to find out as much as you can about what to expect your child's hospital admission so you can answer your child's questions. Where you might find this information:

- The hospital admission letter
- Pre-admission clinic (if provided)
- Ring the ward - evenings are best to call the ward!
- Visit [informationhub.childreninhospital.ie](http://informationhub.childreninhospital.ie)



## Time it right

Make sure to tell your child ahead of time before their hospital admission so they can ask questions and feel prepared. For younger children, a day or two in advance is soon enough so they don't start to worry.

## Talking to your child

Find a quiet space with no distractions to talk to them, and ask them what they want to know - not all children want details.

Look online or check at your local library for books to read with your child about going to hospital.





## Use language your child can understand

Use simple explanations and words that your child understands. Try not to go into too much detail. Some parents find it useful to use dolls or teddies to help younger children understand what to expect.

## Be honest

Do not tell your child that something will not hurt if you know that it could hurt them. Try not to make promises you cannot keep.

## Reassure your child

Reassure them that you or someone they love and trust will be with them as much as possible.



## Pre-admission clinic

Before **some** surgeries there is a **pre-admission clinic** where you will be able to discuss your child's operation or procedure before the hospital admission. Your child might also have tests done during this appointment - this helps to avoid any delays when your child is admitted.

This is a good time to ask questions, share concerns or request supports if your child is very anxious or has special food requirements.

You should ask about play opportunities for your child as this can help reduce anxiety about their hospital visit.

It can be useful to mention if you are breastfeeding or expressing milk as there may be supports available.

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## What To Expect in Hospital

Every hospital and admission is different but the tips below may help you know some of what to expect.

### When you arrive

#### Admission to the hospital

When you arrive at the hospital, you register at the Admission Office. You may be asked to confirm information about yourself and your child or to complete paperwork.

A plastic ID bracelet will be put on your child – this has important information on it and it must always be on their arm or leg.

#### Going to the ward

You and your child will be welcomed to the ward by one of the nurses. They will show your child to their bed, the rest of the ward and where important facilities are, for both you and your child. For example, they may show if there is a play room or the parents' toilets

Once you're settled in, the nurse might:

- Ask questions about your child and check the information they have is correct
- Check your child's weight, height, temperature and blood pressure
- Do other tests such as blood tests



**This can be a good time to ask any questions you have!**

### Top Tip!

**Make sure to tell the nurse if your child has any additional needs or is very scared of procedures and ask what supports are available**



# The daily routine

## Mealtimes

Children's meals will be provided by the hospital at set times.



If your child misses a meal or gets hungry between meals or has any special requirements, tell a nurse or health care assistant.

## Rounds

During "rounds" doctors visit each patient to check on progress and to make decisions about their care. The exact time may vary but the nurses will tell you when it happens on your ward - rounds can sometimes start early!

Write down your questions as it is easy to forget when the doctor arrives, and keep notes - this could include notes about your child's toileting, how they have been feeling and sleeping, if they are eating or drinking, and anything else that might be important to share.



### Parent Tip - Ask Questions!

*That question that you might feel that sounds really silly will niggle at you if you go home without asking it. So just ask!"*

## Daily care

Daily care is provided by the nursing team and health care assistants and includes things like medication, changing dressings and monitoring your child. Your child might also receive care from other members of staff as part of their recovery or treatment.

## What if I need to leave or can't stay overnight?

You may need to leave your child during the day or overnight so that you can get food, have a shower or to return home.

Prepare your child - tell your child where you are going and when you will be back. Don't be surprised if they are upset – it's much better for them to express their emotions than bottle them up.

For some children, it can help to leave for short periods at first so they trust you will return when you say you will.

Always tell the ward staff if you are leaving and when you expect to be back.

If your child cannot be safely left alone and you do not have someone that can take over, talk to your nurse.

## How can I help care for my child in hospital?

You can care for your child in the normal way you do at home such as nappy-changing, washing, feeding and playing - unless there is a medical reason you can't do these things!

If your child has a dressing or tubes, the nurses and healthcare assistants are there to help you as much as you need and to answer your questions.

### Did you know...

**If you are breastfeeding or expressing milk, supports may be available such as meal vouchers, equipment, lactation consultants and fridges or freezers to store milk. Ask your child's nurse what supports are available.**



# Supports for you and your child

## Supports and activities for your child

Depending on the hospital and why and how long your child is in hospital, some of these supports may be available:

- Play specialists are specially trained staff who use play to support children before, during and after procedures. They also organise play activities in the hospital.
- Hospital school
- Music therapy
- Children in Hospital Ireland Play Volunteers - provide play activities for children such as crafts and games. Watch out for the red t-shirts!

Ask a member of your child's team what activities and supports there are for your child.

## Supports for parents and family carers

There are a range of supports that may be available for parents and family carers.

Ask your nurse about supports available or visit the CIH Information Hubs' Family and Wellbeing Supports page for details of some of the hospital, community and condition specific supports that may be available.



InformationHub MENU

+ Outpatient & Emergency
+ Hospital Admissions
+ Health Conditions
+ Family & Wellbeing Supports
+ Financial Supports
+ Search for supports...
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## Remember to look after yourself too!

It is important to **look after yourself** when your child is in hospital, especially if it is a long stay or serious illness. Try and have breaks and leave the ward for food, fresh air and sleep. Try to remember caring for yourself helps you care for your child.

If you feel you are not coping well, ask your child's nurse about supports that may be available to help you such as the medical social worker or hospital psychologist.



### Parent Tip!

*"Bring something other than a phone to distract you - a book, something to do with your hands"*



### Parent Tip!

*"Ask for help if you need it - reach out to family and friends to give you a break"*

### Ask Children In Hospital Ireland volunteers for help

CIH volunteers are trained to play with children in hospital and can often provide respite for a parent who needs to leave their child for a couple of hours.



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## Having an operation - what to expect

### Food and drink on the day of your child's operation

You may be told your child cannot eat or drink before their surgery or procedure.



It is very important to follow these instructions - if your child eats or drinks too near an operation it may be cancelled.

### Anaesthetic

A nurse will bring you and your child to the operating theatre. Your child will be able to take a toy or teddy. Mobile phones or tablets can be particularly useful to distract children at this time.

Usually you can stay with your child to support them while they are given the anaesthetic. If you are feeling very anxious yourself, you do not have to do this.

The anaesthetic may be started while your child is lying on a trolley or smaller children might be allowed to sit on your lap while this happens. Staff will then help you to lift them onto the trolley.

### What is pre-med and magic cream?

**Pre-med** is a sedative that can be given to a child to help them relax before anaesthesia. It can be very useful for children who are very anxious or scared.



**Magic cream** numbs the skin where a needle will be inserted for anaesthetic - make sure to ask the medical team about these options!

## Going to the operating theatre

Children sometimes have to wear a hospital gown with loose fastening ties and with nothing on underneath or they may be able to keep on their own clothes e.g., pyjamas or underwear.

Your child may be brought to the operating theatre on a trolley or they may be able to walk themselves.



The **consent form** is an important form that gives you details about your child's procedure and any risks involved. A doctor should have discussed this with you before going to the operating theatre. Before the operation a theatre nurse will check your child's details again and they will also check that you understand and have signed the consent form.

## What happens after an operation

Your child will spend time in the recovery area. When they return to the ward they might need to rest and sleep to help recover. Nurses keep a close eye on patients after an operation. They will tell you when it is safe for your child to drink, sit up, eat or go to the bathroom.

### Top Tip!

One of the most important things you can do is to talk to the medical staff before the procedure (the earlier the better) to share your child's needs, concerns and how you would like to support them.





# Supporting your child before, during and after an operation or procedure

Whenever possible, you should go with your child to the operating theatre or procedure room. Make sure to bring their favourite toy or blanket for comfort.

Depending on the hospital or ward, your child may be able to spend some time with a **hospital play specialist**, who uses toys, crafts and storytelling to play with your child and to help them understand what they're going to experience, or help them process what they have experienced.



## Useful tips !

- Be positive and encouraging and give your child lots of praise
- Talk to your child in a calm voice and try to be calm yourself as they may pick up on your feelings
- Try not to be distracted by what's going on – give your child your full attention
- Position yourself where your child can see and touch you
- Help your child choose a comfortable position for the procedure.
- You may be asked to help by sitting with them, cuddling or holding them

Give your child lots of praise and reassurance after the procedure and let them share how they are feeling

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## Going Home

Going home from the hospital is called **discharge**. Discharge home can sometimes be quite quick and simple or sometimes there is lots of planning before your child can go home.

The nurse or doctor will give you written **discharge instructions** and will talk to you about them. Listen closely, take notes and be sure to ask questions.

The instructions you get might include information about:

- Medicine your child needs
- Diet and activity guidelines
- Signs and symptoms to look out for at home
- Follow-up appointments
- Any in-home care your child needs



### Getting back to normal

After being in hospital, you may notice your child acting differently. This is normal - some children take longer to adjust than others. Your nurse should provide you with details of things to watch for as your child recovers.

Encourage your child to talk about their experience of being in hospital.

### Returning to school or daycare

Your child might feel worried about going back to nursery or school. Encourage them to speak to you about how they feel and what might help with settling back.

Let teachers and others working with your child know about any worries they have.

# Discharge Checklist

Use our discharge checklist below to help you get ready for going home. Ask your nurse or other members of the care team if you are unsure about anything.

- I have received discharge instructions and I understand the care my child needs after hospital.
- I know the important signs and symptoms to look out for as my child recovers.
- Any follow up appointments have been made.
- Does your child need any prescription medicine, dressings or supplies at home and will you be able to get them in time from your local pharmacy.
- I know who to contact if I have any concerns or questions once I get home.
- I have a plan for how to get home from hospital.
- I have asked for a report to be sent to my family doctor or other professionals who care for my child.
- If my child needs special equipment at home, do I know how it works and what to do if it breaks or needs replacing?
- Have I been given back any of my child's medication that I handed in when we arrived?



## Top Tip!

**Make sure to write down or ask can you record any instructions as it is easy to forget once you are home!**

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## More Important Information

### Advocating for your child

Advocating means **being a voice for your child**. You know and understand your child better than anyone else and can help make sure the best decisions are made for them.

#### Useful tips

- Find out as much as you can about your child's condition - this will help you understand the options for their care or medical treatment
- Get to know your child's care team - to advocate for your child you need to know who to talk to in the hospital
- Use the hospital feedback and complaints processes
- Know your rights - this will help you understand the standard of care you should expect for your child
- Check out the EACH charter - it provides ten principles to ensure the best care for your child in hospital  
[www.each-for-sick-children.org](http://www.each-for-sick-children.org)



### Who can help?

The **Children In Hospital Ireland** team can help you learn more about advocating for your child and understanding their rights.



**Patient Advocacy Services** provide independent advice and assistance if you need to make a complaint about care at a public hospital including children's hospitals.



# Supporting siblings

When a child goes to the hospital, brothers and sisters can feel worried or confused. They may have a change in their daily routines or may be separated from their parents, brother or sister.

Each child is different but the tips below might help you support siblings when a child goes to hospital.



- ♥ Talk about their sibling going to hospital and any worries they have
- ♥ Let them help pack - maybe they can add a picture or small toy
- ♥ Keep them connected to their siblings with phone or video calls
- ♥ Ask them to make a card or picture to give to their sibling in hospital

Sibling visits in hospital - The rules are different in each ward and hospital about sibling visits - check with the hospital staff about the rules in the hospital where your child will be admitted.

## Need more information about supporting siblings?

The InformationHub provides lots more useful advice about:

- How to support and involve siblings before and during a hospital admission
- Supports available for siblings of a child with serious or long term illness.

# Need more information?

## Visit Children In Hospital Ireland's online InformationHub

### Find information about...

- Preparing for hospital appointments and admissions
- Financial supports
- Supporting the whole family
- Database of support organisations



[childreninhospital.informationhub.ie](http://childreninhospital.informationhub.ie)

## Contact Children In Hospital Ireland

They can help you find information and supports, know what to expect in hospital and much more.

Phone: 01 290 3510

Email: [info@childreninhospital.ie](mailto:info@childreninhospital.ie)

Website: [www.childreninhospital.ie](http://www.childreninhospital.ie)



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