

Introduction

This is a story about Annie's surgery. Annie was in the hospital for four days after a spinal fusion. She shares what happened each day of the first week of her surgery.

- Each child is different so the hospital stay after a fusion may be shorter or longer than four days. The length of stay is based on outcomes. When all the outcomes have been met your child is ready for discharge. See the spinal fusion stepping stones. Help your child think positive. This will have a big effect on how well they do after surgery.
- Be sure your child talks with the doctors and nurses about how they feel, whether it is scared, happy or sick. The doctors are there to help your child feel better about the surgery, the stay at the hospital and the recovery at home.

Background

- Scoliosis is when the spine is curved instead of straight. Curves in girls are more likely to become severe. A child with scoliosis will be watched closely by a doctor.
- It may be treated with a brace or with surgery. Mild curves may only need to be checked on a regular basis. If surgery is needed, a spinal fusion is often done. This is when the spine is straightened with stiff rods. A bone graft is added to the curved area. This will hold the correction and keep the spine from curving more.

Day of surgery

My name is Annie. I had my fusion done today. When I was lying on the hospital cart going back to my room, I felt a little sick when the elevator stopped on the floor where I would be staying. I felt like someone from outer space. That's because I had all these wires hooked up to me. The wires were connected to machines to do things like monitor my heartbeat and count how fast I breathed in and out. Another monitor made my finger glow like E.T.'s finger in the movie. This was to check how much oxygen there was in my blood.

Along with the wires, I had IV tubes. The IV was great because that was how I got my pain medicine. The nurse called it PCA. PCA stands for Patient Controlled Analgesia. I could push a button to make the PCA machine put some pain medicine into my IV. It was like changing TV channels. Whenever I hurt, I just pushed the button; then, I was given just the right amount of pain medicine.

My body felt really weird after the fusion. My face and eyes were puffy. The nurse said it was because I was face down during the surgery. I had a big band-aid® called dressing on my back where more tubes were coming out. These tubes helped my back stay clean. The nurse called them drains. Because I had the big band-aid® and tubes on my back, I felt more comfortable lying on my side. The nurse helped me turn every few hours. It felt good to change positions.

I also had a tube to empty my bladder. I called this my pee tube. It was great to not have to get up to use the bathroom.

Day of surgery (continued)

I don't remember a lot about this day because I used my button for pain medicine a lot. The medicine made me sleepy and helped me rest. I brought things from home to help me relax and sleep easier. I brought my iPod® so I could listen to my favorite music. Music always helps me feel better. I brought my pillow so I could be reminded of my home. Thinking about what makes me feel better when I'm not feeling good helps.

Day one after surgery

I had to get used to a lot of people coming into my room. After all, my bedroom at home is off limits to everyone except to a few lucky people. There were about five doctors that woke me up early this morning. They checked the band-aid® on my back and my drains. They also checked my heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure and blood count. The doctors told me it is important that my blood count numbers stay high to help me feel better. Before my back surgery, I gave blood just in case I would need it during my surgery. My blood count numbers weren't high enough so the nurse hooked my blood into my IV and gave me my blood back. It did make me feel stronger - not like Superman - but I did have more energy.

The doctors said physical therapy would come and help me try to sit up today. Wow! They must really think I'm Superman! I thought, "How would I ever sit up so soon?" I had forgot about my cool magic pain button. I pressed the button just before the big event. Then two nurses or my physical therapist helped me sit up. First I rolled onto my side; one helper lifted my shoulders, while the other helper swung my legs off the bed. I was really sitting! It felt weird. I was dizzy because I had been lying down for so long. Some of that weird feeling was from the pain medicine. My dad teased me and said some of that dizziness was just natural for me. He made me smile and it helped me feel better. The nurse or physical therapist helped me sit up two times today, a few minutes at a time. I also raised the head of my bed to help me get used to sitting so I didn't get so dizzy. My doctor said I could get moving as fast as I wanted. I could stand and take some steps to a chair if I felt good enough today. He reminded me that the more I get up and moving the less stiff I will feel and the better my stomach and intestines will feel.

Days two and three after surgery

By now, I was getting used to the routine. The doctors woke me up again. I was eager to tell them what a great job I did sitting up and standing yesterday. The doctors said my job today would be to stand up, sit in a chair, wash up and eat with help from occupational therapy. Maybe I would take a few steps to the bathroom or out in the hall.

I knew that these next days would be busy. They would want me to do more activity. I also knew that it was time to take my band-aid® off. The tape was a little sticky and pulled a little at my skin, but it was needed so it would hold the band-aid® tight like it needed to be.

Days two and three after surgery (continued)

The doctors said everything looked good. My mom got to see my back for the first time. The doctors said I didn't need the tubes so they were taken out. It stung a little when they were pulled out, but only for a few seconds. It felt good to have only a thin bandage put on my back.

My pee tube was taken out today, too. When they pulled the tube out, I got a weird feeling, like I had to use the bathroom. When I tried to go to the bathroom, I couldn't. The nurse said some kids have a hard time going to the bathroom for the first time. Not me! I had no trouble when I tried to go a few hours later.

My dad bet that I couldn't walk from my bed to the hallway. I timed my walks just like when I sat up. I took my pills and waited 30 minutes to give the medicine a chance to work. For my first walk, I could only take a few steps. The hip where they took some bone hurt a little when I walked. Some kids get this bone from a bone bank and won't have this pain! The first couple steps hurt the worst, after that it wasn't so bad. The second time I walked, I made it to the doorway. I was making good progress. By my third walk, I made it to the hallway, so I won the bet with my dad.

With all the activity I was having on the third day, I was feeling hungry. At first I was only allowed to eat ice chips. This was because my insides still weren't awake and working like they should. By evening, I was able to feed myself Jell-O® and popsicles®. Boy, did they taste great! Later on I got to eat real food. That helped me feel a little stronger and not feel sick to my stomach when I took my pain pills. I also washed my face and brushed my teeth while I sat up in bed. This made me feel much better.

Day four after surgery

I knew each day I would have to walk a little farther. That was okay. I was nervous because I no longer had my magic pain button. But that ended up being okay, too. I just timed my walks around the time I was given a pain pill. I walked to the end of the hall and back. I sat up three times for a half hour to an hour each time. I also walked up and down a few steps.

Getting up to use the bathroom got easier each time. Today when I went to the bathroom, I was a little bummed out when I saw I had my period. Before surgery, the nurse told me this might happen. I thought there would be no way, because I just had my period a week ago. Occupational therapy helped me wash up and change my gown so I felt better.

Later in the day, my stomach began to hurt and I thought it was from eating food too soon. But my nurse thought it was from something else. She gave me some medicine to help me poop. After I went to the bathroom, I felt much better.

The nurse spent some time talking with my parents about what to watch for once I went home. My parents learned how to change the dressing on my back. Later that day, someone came to talk to my parents about how to order dressing supplies that will be delivered to my hospital room or my house.

Day four after surgery (continued)

I have made a lot of progress. I even got to have my IV capped off or closed. This meant that no more tubes were connected to me. The occupational therapist came in again and taught me how to put on my own PJ's and it felt good!

I continued with my walks. I even did a lap around the nurse's station! I went up and down a whole flight of stairs. The nurse reminded me how it was important to continue to walk once I went home.

Going home

When the doctors came to see me they said I could go home! I was so excited! My nurse spent more time with my parents. My mom finished learning how to take care of me at home. She showed the nurse how she could do the dressing change, put on my brace, how to help me out of bed and to walk. The nurse and my therapists reviewed important information with us. They told us when to call the doctor, how to bathe at home and what things I was not allowed to do. I needed to know that I shouldn't bend or lift objects heavier than 5 pounds for the next three months.

The nurse said I could go back to school in 2 to 3 weeks. She told me to get 2 sets of books from school so I wouldn't have to carry a backpack. I was allowed to do half days at first, then whole days when I felt ready. My parents were sure to check with my schoolteachers so I could keep up with schoolwork. The nurse also said I would need to skip gym class for the next 4 to 6 months. The doctor gave me pain pills to take once I was home. The nurse said I might need the pills for a few weeks at home.

The doctor said he wanted to see me about 10 to 14 days after I went home. He will check my back and take out the stitches at that time, if I have any. With each visit to the doctor, I will learn more about what is okay and not okay to do. In about 6 to 8 weeks, I'll have some x-rays taken to see how well my back is doing.

Before I left the hospital, the doctors and nurses told me how proud they were of me. They said this was a big surgery to have done and that I came through it very well! You will, too!

Be sure to give yourself a big pat on the back! In the case of this surgery, that line makes for a good figure of speech!

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.