

Hospital Stays

Being on treatment can be a long process, with many visits and stays in the hospital of varying lengths. This will require many adjustments, including coping with unexpected events, delays and setbacks. Adjusting to managing life in hospital can include, watching your child go through difficult procedures, communicating with staff, uncertainty about length of stay, as well as difficulty getting enough rest. It can be emotionally demanding to spend long periods of time supporting your child in hospital.

Some ideas to help take care of yourself and your child in hospital include:

- ✔ **Try to follow regular routines as you would at home.** Get up, get dressed, and open blinds. This includes routines that you have developed with your child, including bedtime routines, such as reading a story before bed. New routines, such as dressing changes, and mouth care, will also need to be incorporated.
- ✔ **Bring items from home for your child.** Pick a favourite toy or other comfort items (e.g. blanket, game, stuff animal, book) to bring to the hospital. Having familiar items will help your child feel safe and secure.
- ✔ **Utilise extended family supports and friends.** This may include getting support to help siblings enjoy their normal activities, or alternatively having a special someone in your child's life stay with them in hospital.
- ✔ **When needed, ensure that you have a break from the ward.** Even if it is to get a coffee or go for a walk. If you worry about leaving your child, it might be helpful to use the services available, such as art, music and play therapy to engage with your child while you are away. Staff understand that it is important for parents and carers to take breaks from the ward and from the hospital. The nursing staff will make sure your child is well cared for while you are taking a break.
- ✔ **Take advantage of learning opportunities.** Continuing to support your child with developmental and learning opportunities whilst in hospital. The Education Institute can work with your child's school to ensure educational support while your child is in hospital.
- ✔ **Take photographs.** This experience is part of your family's life. You may choose to not look at these photos in the future; however, if you haven't taken any, then it takes away that option. These photographs could also be a tool to help your child process the experience that they are going through in the future.
- ✔ **Encourage your child to play,** and to be as active as they want to be. Make use of the ward resources, such as the play room or art and music therapy to help with this.
- ✔ **Outliers -** There may be times when, depending on bed availability or for medical reasons, you and your child will be on another ward in the hospital. You may not know the staff and the ward as well, and this can result in families feeling isolated from the cancer centre. You have not been forgotten, and members of your treating team are able to visit you on other wards. It might also be useful to get to know the staff on the ward, as they can help to connect you to services that you require. Don't be afraid to talk about your concerns if you are feeling isolated.