



Surgery for Chiari malformation type I

This family education sheet explains the surgery for Chiari malformation type I (CMI).

Key points

- The surgery involves removing a small piece of bone at the base of your child's skull and at the top of your child's spine.
- You can expect to stay at the hospital with your child for 2-4 days.
- They can probably go back to school or light work 2-3 weeks after surgery.

What is the surgery for CMI?

- The surgery is called a posterior fossa decompression.
- A neurosurgeon will carefully remove a small piece of bone at the base of your child's skull and the top of your child's spine to create more room for the cerebellum and to restore normal cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) fluid flow.

How long should I expect my child to be hospitalized?

- Most children go home about 2-4 days after surgery.
- After surgery, the focus will be on getting your child's pain well controlled and eating and walking before you go home.
- Your child may need to stay at the hospital longer if they need extra monitoring or pain management.

What should I expect right after surgery?

- **In the recovery room:** Your child will spend a few hours in a monitored area where nurses will check their breathing, heart rate and pain levels often. They'll have an IV for fluids and pain medicine.
- **Moving around:** We'll probably encourage your child to sit up and try to get out of bed by the next morning and take short walks in the hallway as soon as they feel up for it.
- **Pain control and wound care:** Surgery can cause a lot of soreness near the muscles at the back of the head and neck. Surgery can also cause nausea and a loss of appetite over the first day or two.
 - Your child will get medications through the IV or by mouth for pain. They can probably shower after a few days, depending on what their surgeon decides.

- **Rehabilitation:** Almost everyone goes home without needing rehabilitation in the hospital. Your child will probably get simple neck-strengthening and posture exercise recommendations before you go home.
 - They may need outpatient physical therapy for a few weeks if their care team thinks it can help with recovery.

When can my child go back to school and activities?

- Your child can probably go back to school or light work about 2-3 weeks after surgery.
- They should plan to skip PE/gym class, sports practice and playground activities for about 6 weeks to keep their incision safe and to let the scar heal.
- After around 4-6 weeks, they can start non-contact exercise (walking, swimming, gentle bike rides) if their surgeon says it's OK.
- Your child will have follow-up visits to check that everything is healing well. Always talk with their neurosurgeon before trying anything new!

This Family Education Sheet is available in Spanish.