Questions to Ask Before Orthopaedic Surgery (Child with Cerebral Palsy)

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Bring this checklist to pre-op visits. Check off items as you discuss them with your child's surgeon, pediatrician, and anesthesia team.

Child's name: _____ Surgery type/date: _____
Surgeon: _____ Hospital: _____

1) Goals & decision making

- What problem is this surgery trying to fix (pain, function, positioning, hygiene, hip stability, scoliosis, walking)?
- What happens if we wait or don't do surgery now?
- What are the realistic benefits for my child specifically?
- What are the biggest risks for my child specifically?
- How will we measure success (comfort, participation, mobility, caregiving)?

2) Medical history & planning

- Are there any medical issues that increase anesthesia or surgical risk for my child?
- Are there medication allergies or reactions to tape/adhesives/latex we should plan for?
- Who should complete the pre-op physical exam (pediatrician, complex care team)?

3) Anesthesia & pain control

- Will an anesthesiologist experienced with CP be involved?
- What is the plan to reduce aspiration risk (reflux meds, suctioning, induction plan)?
- What is the plan for pain control (nerve block/epidural/catheter + non-opioid meds)?
- How will you limit opioids to protect breathing?
- Is ICU admission possible after surgery? What would trigger that?

4) Seizures / neurology (if applicable)

- Do we need neurology clearance before surgery?
- What is the plan to keep seizure medicines on schedule while fasting?
- What is the rescue plan if my child has a seizure around surgery?
- Are any seizure medicines increasing bleeding risk or causing other concerns?

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5) Breathing / lungs (if applicable)

- Does my child need pulmonary or ENT evaluation (snoring/sleep apnea/aspiration history)?
- How will you manage secretions and airway clearance after surgery?
- If my child uses CPAP/ventilator or has a trach: what is the post-op respiratory plan and discharge plan?

6) Feeding / GI / nutrition

- Is my child's nutrition strong enough for healing? Should we check nutrition labs?
- If my child has a G-tube: how does that affect surgery risk and feeding plan after surgery?
- What is the constipation prevention plan before and after surgery?

7) Blood loss, IV access, and clot risk

- How much blood loss is expected? Will blood counts/platelets be checked pre-op?
- Will blood-saving steps be used (TXA, cell saver)?
- Is my child likely to have difficult IV access? Do we need extra time or special planning?
- Does my child need DVT prevention? What signs should we watch for?

8) Skin, wound care, and infection prevention

- Will the team check skin before surgery for breakdown near the surgical area?
- How will pressure sores be prevented during recovery (turning schedule, mattress/cushions)?
- What wound care instructions should we follow at home and what signs of infection should we watch for?

9) Equipment, therapy, and discharge

- What equipment will we need at home (wheelchair, bed, commode/toilet chair, braces/orthotics)?
- What is the therapy plan (PT/OT) and when does it start?
- Who do we call with urgent concerns after discharge and what symptoms require immediate care?

Reference:

Chambers HG, et al. Preoperative Evaluation of the Child With Cerebral Palsy. JPOSNA (2026).