

# Let's Talk About...

## Anesthesia for Children

### What is anesthesia?

**Anesthesia** [an-eh-STHEE-zee-ah] is the use of medicine to block feeling and pain during a medical procedure. It may be used to block feeling in just one area of your child's body or in the entire body.

A doctor or nurse who specializes in anesthesia will recommend options based on the needs of your child. A doctor who specializes in anesthesia is called an **anesthesiologist**. A nurse with specialized training in anesthesia is called a **certified registered nurse anesthetist**, or **CNRA**.

### Is anesthesia safe?

Overall, anesthesia is very safe. However, with any type of anesthesia, there may be some side effects or problems (although rare). The most common problems are nausea and vomiting, damage to teeth and gums, and waking up disoriented or combative.

Very rare problems — like infections, bleeding, blood clots, paralysis, stroke, brain damage, heart attack, or death — are also possible.

### Types of anesthesia

#### General anesthesia

This is the most common type of anesthesia used for children during surgery. It will put your child into a deep sleep and block most feeling throughout your child's body.

**How it's given:** Medicine is given either through a small plastic tube (an IV) which is inserted into a vein, or as a gas to breathe, or both. After your child is asleep, the doctor may place a breathing tube down your child's throat to help them breathe.

#### Epidural anesthesia

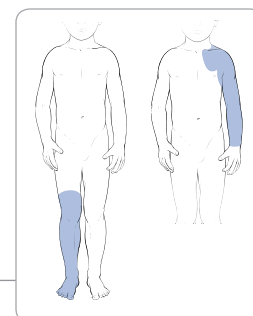
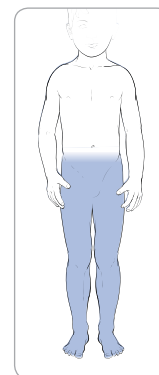
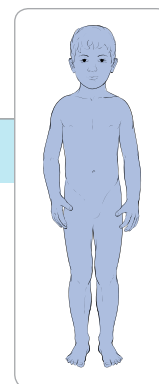
These types of anesthesia are typically used in combination with general anesthesia to help control pain after surgery. They block pain in the lower half of the body.

**How these are given:** **Epidural** [eh-pih-DUR-ahl] anesthesia involves inserting a needle near the spinal cord. A thin tube is then put through the needle. The needle is removed, and the tube stays in place. This way, medicine can be given through the tube as needed.

#### Local anesthesia or nerve block

This type of anesthesia blocks pain in a specific area of the body, like an arm or a leg. If used, it is usually combined with general anesthesia in children while they are asleep to help with pain afterwards.

**How it's given:** Medicine is injected into the skin or muscle near an incision, a joint, or a specific nerve. A small tube may be placed in the area so that more medicine can be given as needed.



## What are the benefits and possible risks of anesthesia?

### General anesthesia

**Benefits:** Can be started quickly and makes your child go to sleep quickly. It blocks most feeling, including pain.

**Possible risks:**

- Throat pain, temporary voice changes, or injury to the mouth or teeth from the breathing tube
- Drowsiness, confusion, or restlessness when waking up
- Nausea or vomiting
- Breathing problems or fluid in the lungs
- Teeth clenching when waking up, which may cause injury to the teeth, mouth, or dental work
- Very rarely, heart problems, stroke, vision loss, or other life-threatening problems
- Being aware

### Epidural anesthesia

**Benefits:** Blocks most feeling from the waist or chest down, and works quickly.

**Possible risks:**

- Headache or backache
- Low blood pressure
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pain or itching
- Numbness spreading too high in the body, resulting in the need for a breathing tube
- Blood-vessel injury or infection
- Convulsions
- Very rarely, injury to the nerves or spinal cord

### Local anesthesia or nerve block

**Benefits:** This has few side effects.

**Possible risks:**

- Infection
- Pain
- Ongoing numbness or weakness
- Blood-vessel injury
- Convulsions

## What happens when my child receives anesthesia?

- **Your child may have an IV inserted in a vein.** This allows your child to receive fluids and medicines.
- **The anesthesiologist will use special equipment** to check your child's breathing, heartbeat, blood pressure, and temperature during the procedure.
- **Your child may have a tube inserted through the mouth and down the throat** to help with breathing during surgery. This will happen after your child is asleep so they won't feel it.

## How will my child feel when the anesthesia wears off?

The way your child feels after the medical procedure depends on the type of anesthesia used. Your child may feel tingling, burning, or aching.

Younger children, especially, may wake up restless, anxious, or combative. These effects are all temporary and will go away quickly.

**Your child's pain will continue to be treated after surgery.** Your child may be given pain medicine by mouth or through an IV. Your child may also have a pump or device that controls how often and how much medicine is given.

