

Anesthesia for Children

What is it?

Anesthesia is the use of medications to block feeling and including pain during a medical procedure. These medications can block feeling in a specific area of your child's body or in the whole body. You can read about the different kinds of anesthesia on the second page of this handout.

A doctor will recommend a type of anesthesia based on your child's needs. A doctor who specializes in anesthesia care is called an **anesthesiologist**. A nurse with specialized training in anesthesia care is called a **CRNA** (Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist). Be sure to ask if you have any questions or concerns.

What happens before my child's anesthesia?

These steps will help to make sure your child has the safest anesthesia care:

- Your child should not eat or drink for several hours before surgery. This is very important. Anesthesia can cause the stomach muscles to relax. If there's anything in the stomach, it can come up and cause your child to choke or vomit. Your child could also breathe stomach contents into the lungs, which can cause serious problems. Be sure to accurately report the last time your child ate or drank.
- A healthcare provider will take a complete medical history. This is also very important for safe care.
 - Report your child's medical problems, recent illnesses, allergies, and current medications (including vitamins, herbs, supplements, and over-the-counter medications).
 - Report any past reactions to anesthesia for both your child and family members. Your child's anesthesia provider must know this in order to plan the safest possible care.
- Your child may have lab tests, x-rays or other tests to evaluate health status before the procedure.

What happens during my child's procedure?

- Your child may have an IV catheter (small plastic tube) inserted in a vein. This allows your child to receive fluids and medications.
- Your child may have a tube inserted through the mouth and into the trachea (windpipe) to help with breathing during surgery. This happens after your child is asleep.
- Monitors will be used to help the anesthesiologist continually evaluate your child's breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature.

What happens after the procedure?

What your child feels after your child's procedure depends on the type of anesthesia used. The table on this handout lists some possible side effects.

Healthcare providers will continue to work with your child to manage pain after surgery. Your child may take oral pain medication or get pain medication through an IV or catheter. Your child may also have a device that allows him to control how often he gets pain medication.

Is anesthesia safe?

Though **very rare**, all forms of anesthesia carry risk of severe complications. These can include infection, bleeding, drug reactions, blood clots, paralysis, stroke, brain damage, heart attack, or death. The information on the second page of this fact sheet summarizes the most common forms of anesthesia, including benefits and potential risks. Other, less common, side effects are also possible. Be sure to ask your anesthesia provider if you have questions or concerns.

Types of anesthesia

General anesthesia. This blocks most feeling throughout your child's whole body. It causes complete loss of consciousness. It is used for most major surgeries.

How it's given: Anesthesia medication is given through an IV or as an inhaled gas — or both. After your child is asleep, a tube may be inserted through the mouth into the airway to help your child keep breathing.

Possible benefits: General anesthesia can be started quickly and causes rapid loss of consciousness. It blocks most sensation, including pain.

Possible risks or side effects:

- Throat pain, hoarseness, or injury to the mouth or teeth from the breathing tube
- Drowsiness, confusion, or restlessness when waking up
- Breathing problems, pneumonia
- Teeth clenching when waking up, which may cause injury to the teeth, mouth, or dental work
- Nausea or vomiting
- Very rarely, heart problems, stroke, or other life-threatening complications

Monitored anesthesia care (MAC). This calms your child and may put your child to sleep, but does not cause unconsciousness. Its is used for minor surgeries when general anesthesia is not needed.

How it's given: The anesthesia medication is given through an IV.

Possible benefits: MAC keeps your child comfortable during surgery, and often causes sleep. It has fewer side effects than general anesthesia, and allows your child to wake up more quickly after surgery

Possible risks or side effects:

- Loss of memory for what was heard or felt during surgery
- Loss of consciousness
- Breathing problems
- Anxiety
- Nausea and vomiting
- Awareness

Epidural or spinal anesthesia. These are often used to block pain in the lower half of the body. This type of pain relief may also be used after surgery with other types of anesthetics to help with pain management.

How these are given:

- With an epidural, a needle is inserted into the space around your child's spinal canal. A thin catheter is then threaded through the needle. The needle is removed and the catheter stays in place. This way, medication can be given through the catheter more than one time, with dosage increased or decreased as needed.
- With a spinal block, medication is injected through a needle directly into the spinal canal in your child's lower back.

Possible benefits: These block most feeling from the waist or chest down. Takes effect quickly. Your child may remain awake. May also be used to give other types of pain medication after surgery.

Possible risks or side effects:

- Headache or backache
- Buzzing in the ears
- Convulsions
- Low blood pressure
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Itching

- Numbness spreading too high in the body, resulting in the need for a breathing tube
- Blood-vessel injury or infection
- Unrelieved pain
- Very rarely, permanent injury or death

Local anesthesia / nerve block. This is used to block pain in a specific area of the body, such as an arm or leg. In children, this is often combined with general anesthesia.

How it's given: Pain medication is injected into the skin or muscle around the incision, near a joint, or near a specific nerve. A catheter may be placed so that more medication can be given as needed.

Possible benefits: Temporary loss of feeling and/or movement of a specific limb or area. Very few side effects. Your child may remain awake.

Possible risks or side effects:

- Infection
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- Convulsions
- Unrelieved pain

Weakness

- · Persistent numbness
- Blood-vessel injury or infection