

Anesthesia

What is anesthesia?

Anesthesia [an-uhs-STEEZ-ya] is the use of medications called **anesthetics** [an-uhs-STET-icks] to block most feeling, including pain. These medications can block feeling in a specific area of your body, or your whole body. Types of anesthesia include:

- **General anesthetics** that block most sensation. They cause you to lose consciousness (go to sleep).
- **Monitored anesthesia care (MAC)** which uses anesthesia that sedates (calms) you and may put you to sleep. It does not cause you to fully lose consciousness.
- **Regional or local anesthetics** that act on a specific area of the body. Epidural and spinal blocks are often used to numb the lower half of your body. Other nerve blocks can be injected or given through an IV (in the vein) or a catheter (tube) to a specific area, such as an arm or leg.

You may get one of these types of anesthesia, or a combination. A doctor or nurse who specializes in anesthesia will recommend options based on your needs. A doctor who specializes in anesthesia care is called an **anesthesiologist** [an-uh-steez-ee-AHL-uh-jist]. A nurse with specialized training in anesthesia care is called a **CRNA** (certified registered nurse anesthetist [a-NESS-tuh-tist]).

What can I expect during anesthesia?

What happens during a procedure will be different for each patient. In general, you can expect:

- An IV or small catheter (tube) to be placed into a vein in your arm. This allows you to receive fluids and medications.
- A tube inserted through your mouth and into your airway (windpipe) to help you breathe during surgery. This happens after you are asleep.
- Continual checks on your breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature during the procedure.

What can I expect after surgery?

What you feel after surgery depends on the type of anesthesia used. Your healthcare team will work with you to manage your pain. You may be given one or more of these options to help you manage your pain:

- Pain medication given by IV, nerve catheter, injection, pump, or pill
- Ice or cold therapy
- Repositioning with pillows and supports
- Alternative therapies, such as meditation, music therapy, aromatherapy, or pet therapy

How do I prepare?

Before your procedure:

- **Tell your doctor about any allergies you have and all medicines you take.** Include all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines (such as cough syrup or allergy pills), patches, inhalers, vitamins, herbal remedies, and street drugs.
- **Follow all instructions on when to stop eating and drinking before your procedure.** This will help prevent possible problems with the anesthesia.
- **Tell your healthcare team about your medical history.** Report all medical problems, recent illnesses, and allergies. Tell your care team if you or any of your family members have ever had a reaction to anesthesia or any other medications.
- **If you are a woman, tell your care team if you are using birth control with any kind of hormone, such as pills or implants.** Some medications given during anesthesia and surgery can decrease the effectiveness of these birth control methods. If you are using oral or implantable contraceptives you should consider alternative methods of birth control during this cycle.

Is anesthesia safe?

Though very rare, **all forms of anesthesia carry some risk of severe complications**, such as infection, bleeding, drug reactions, blood clots, loss of vision, paralysis, stroke, brain damage, heart attack, or death. Other risks are also possible. Be sure to ask your anesthesia provider if you have questions or concerns. The table below summarizes some common possible side effects, benefits and risks of anesthesia.

What it is	How it's given	Actions and possible benefits	Possible risks or side effects
<p>General anesthesia Causes complete loss of consciousness. Used for many major surgeries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anesthesia medication is given through an IV or as an inhaled gas — or both. After you're asleep, a tube may be inserted through your mouth into your airway to help you keep breathing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be started quickly and causes rapid loss of consciousness Blocks most sensation, including pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throat pain, hoarseness, or injury to your mouth or teeth from the breathing tube Drowsiness, confusion, or restlessness as you wake up Teeth clenching as you wake up, which may cause injury to your teeth, mouth, or dental work Nausea or vomiting Breathing problems, pneumonia Very rarely, heart problems, stroke, or other life threatening complications
<p>Monitored anesthesia care (MAC) Calms you and may put you to sleep, but does not cause unconsciousness. Used for minor surgeries when general anesthesia is not needed.</p>	<p>Anesthesia medication is given through an IV.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeps you comfortable during surgery, and often causes sleep Allows you to wake up more quickly after surgery Fewer side effects than general anesthesia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of memory Loss of consciousness Breathing problems Anxiety Nausea and vomiting Awareness during procedure
<p>Local anesthesia / nerve block Blocks pain in one small area of the body. May be chosen as preferred anesthesia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary loss of feeling and/or movement of a specific limb or area Very few side effects You may remain awake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infection Convulsions Persistent numbness Weakness Unrelieved pain Blood-vessel injury or infection
<p>Epidural or spinal anesthesia Blocks pain in large area of the body. May be chosen as preferred anesthesia. This type of pain relief may also be used after surgery with other types of anesthetics to help with pain management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A needle is inserted into the epidural space around your spinal canal. A tube is threaded through the needle. The needle is removed and the tube stays in place. Medication can be given through the tube more than one time, with dosage increased or decreased as needed. Medication can also be injected through a needle directly into the spinal canal in your lower back. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blocks most feeling from the waist or chest down Takes effect quickly You may remain awake Medication can be given through a tube more than one time, with dosage increased or decreased as needed May also be used to give other types of pain medication after surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headache or backache Buzzing in your ears Convulsions Low blood pressure Dizziness or lightheadedness 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

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