

Risks of Anesthesia

The safety of anesthetic procedures has improved dramatically in recent years, and it is unlikely that you will experience any complications of your anesthesia care. Nonetheless, anesthesiologists feel that it is important for you to be informed of the possible risks of anesthesia and of the complications that sometimes occur. Risks of anesthesia may be related to your medical history and current health status.

Most problems resulting from anesthesia are minor and temporary. Here are some examples:

- Sometimes positioning on the operating bed can cause soreness from stretching of muscles, ligaments, and nerves.
- With general anesthesia, a tooth may be injured during the placement of the breathing tube. There may also be minor injury to the lips or tongue.
- With spinal anesthesia, a temporary headache may occur, which may require another procedure to treat.

More serious complications of anesthesia are rare, but do occur. For example, unexpected reactions to the anesthetic agents could cause seizures, severe drops in blood pressure, or cardiac arrest. When such rare events occur, treatment is immediately instituted in an effort to avoid permanent problems.

However, in rare instances, complications of anesthesia can cause severe and permanent injuries, including paralysis, brain damage, and even death.

Each type of anesthesia has benefits and risks, and each patient reacts to and tolerates anesthesia somewhat differently. It is your right and responsibility to ask questions about your anesthesia care. Feel free to ask

your anesthesiologist for information about the anesthetic plan, associated risks, and possible complications.

After you fully understand the contents of this brochure, please sign the Risk Factor Acknowledgment Form on the last page and return it to your provider. It will then be placed in your medical record.

Types of Anesthesia

Anesthetic options will be discussed during the preoperative interview. There are four main categories of anesthesia: sedation, general, local, and regional.

SEDATION

Sedation involves the use of intravenous (in a vein) or oral medications that provide relaxation and pain control. The level of sedation, including conscious sedation, is adjusted by the anesthesiologist as necessary. This is the most common type of anesthesia care in office settings.

GENERAL ANESTHESIA

With general anesthesia, you are unconscious and have no awareness of the surgical procedure or other sensations. General anesthesia is produced by medications that are given intravenously and by medications that are inhaled through a mask or a special breathing tube inserted through the nose or mouth.

REGIONAL ANESTHESIA

If you have regional anesthesia, your anesthesiologist will inject a medication near a cluster of nerves to numb the region of your body that requires surgery.

There are several types of regional anesthetics. Epidural and spinal anesthetics are types of regional anesthesia involving the

placement of numbing medication through the skin of the lower back in order to numb the nerves of the abdomen and legs. Plexus or nerve blocks are types of injections that are used to numb portions of extremities (arms, hands, legs, or feet). During regional anesthesia, you may remain awake, or you may also receive general anesthesia.

LOCAL ANESTHESIA

Local anesthesia involves the placement of numbing medication into the skin and tissues to numb the area of the surgical incision. Sedation is often used to supplement local anesthesia.

This is designed to provide you with information about anesthesia for your upcoming procedure. It explains who administers it, the types of anesthesia available, and some of the risks associated with anesthesia care. The pamphlet is not intended as a substitute for a thorough discussion with your anesthesia provider.

Advances in Anesthesiology

Anesthesiologists are physicians whose education positions them to fill many roles in our health care system for the benefit of patients. Following college and medical school, all anesthesiologists enter a four-year residency training program to specialize in the field of anesthesiology. Highly specialized training, called

fellowships, may follow for additional years. Anesthesiologists undergo rigorous certification examinations, and the majority are certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology

The Anesthesiologist's Role

Anesthesiologists provide medical care and consultations in many settings and situations. Here are just a few examples:

- Anesthesiologists provide patient care throughout the surgical experience. This care includes medically evaluating the patient before surgery, consulting with the surgical team, providing pain control and support of life functions during surgery, and supervising care immediately after surgery.
- Because of their specialty training, anesthesiologists are uniquely qualified to prescribe and administer therapies for managing pain outside of the operating room. For example, some anesthesiologists are actively involved in the management of chronic pain.
- For childbirth, anesthesiologists provide pain relief for the mother while taking into consideration the safety of the baby.
- Anesthesiologists are often leaders in the intensive care unit (ICU) of modern medical centers, where they help restore critically ill patients to a stable condition.