



Anesthesia and Children

If your child needs surgery or another medical procedure that requires anesthesia, you may be uneasy and have many questions. It is important to keep calm and in control of your emotions to avoid transferring your anxiety to your child, as children who are less fearful and anxious have an easier time before and after the procedure.

Before the procedure, you'll meet with your child's anesthesiologist or CRNA to discuss what type of anesthesia will be used and what to expect. You'll be able to ask questions about what your child will experience before, during, and after the procedure and potential side effects. Your provider will want to know about your child's medical history in order to make the right choices about anesthetic medicines. You'll be asked questions such as:

- Does your child have allergies or asthma?
- Has anyone in the family had a bad reaction to anesthesia?
- Has your child had anesthesia before? If so, what was the experience like?

To ensure your child's safety during the surgery, be sure to answer all of the anesthesiologist's questions honestly. Things that may seem harmless could affect the anesthesia and your child's reaction to it.

You will also be given instructions about what to do before the surgery or procedure. They will be based on your child's age, medical condition, and the type and timing of the procedure. Instructions will include what your child may eat and drink and when. In particular, eating restrictions before surgery are especially important because anesthesia can suspend the body's natural reflexes that prevent food from being aspirated into the lungs when it is swallowed or thrown up. In some cases, it may be acceptable to drink clear liquids before surgery, but be sure to clarify this with your provider.

Based on the type of procedure and your child's individual needs, s/he will be given one of the following types of anesthesia:

- general — when your child would be fully unconscious or “asleep”
- regional — when one large area of the body is numbed
- local — when one small part of the body is numbed



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Depending on what works best for your child, the anesthetic will either be given through an intravenous (IV) line or through a mask that lets your child inhale the medication. Your child will be closely monitored throughout the entire procedure for changes in heart rate, breathing and blood pressure. If needed, adjustments in the anesthesia will be made to keep your child safe and comfortable.

Recovery times vary from child to child, so it is difficult to predict exactly when and how your child will come out of anesthesia after a procedure. Some children will be groggy for a while afterward, and others may come out fully alert. Some may experience mild side effects such as nausea and vomiting; this is normal and should subside relatively quickly. Depending on the procedure or surgery, your child may also have some pain and discomfort, which the anesthesiologist can relieve with medicines.

After recovering from the anesthetic, your child will be evaluated to make sure he or she is ready for discharge from the recovery room. You will receive instructions about what to expect at home and how to assist in recovery while keeping your child comfortable.

Tips for helping your child prepare for the experience

- Talk with the surgeon, without your child, to get all the information you need.
- Answer your child's questions honestly and give some facts calmly, but without being too graphic or detailed about what your child will experience. If you don't know the answer, say "We'll ask."
- Let your child know that it is normal to experience some pain or to feel a little sick afterward. This is normal and will eventually go away.
- Emphasize that you will be with your child as much as you can, and even though you will not be with him/her EVERY minute, you will be waiting nearby.
- Before and after the procedure, sit at the bedside and comfort your child as soon as you are allowed. If appropriate, snuggle, cuddle, hold, and touch your child.
- Control your emotions and your behavior. Although you may be very upset and anxious, display a calm, soothing, trusting manner to your child.
- Remember your role as a parent. Your emotions and behavior can have an impact on your child's outcome, so take your parental role very seriously.