



Midwest Anesthesia Associates

Obesity, Sleep Apnea, and Anesthesia

Patients who are obese or morbidly obese face increased risks when they undergo anesthesia. These may include:

- Making it more difficult to find veins to deliver anesthesia and life-saving emergency medications.
- Making it harder to determine the right dose of medications.
- Adding to recovery time because it takes longer for the effects of anesthesia to wear off.
- Increasing the risk of breathing problems caused by pain medications.
- Making it more difficult to place a breathing tube.
- Increasing the likelihood of having obstructive sleep apnea, which can make it more challenging to ensure you get enough oxygen and breathe properly before, during, and after surgery.

While anyone can have sleep apnea, regardless of age or weight, the condition is most common in men over 40 who are overweight. This condition causes people to temporarily stop breathing when they sleep because the soft tissue at the back of the throat collapses. The body restarts breathing by waking you up. Understandably, obstructive sleep apnea increases the risks of anesthesia by slowing down breathing and making the patient more sensitive to the effects.

If you know you have obstructive sleep apnea, be sure to tell your anesthesiologist or certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) during your pre-operative consultation. Snoring, moving a lot during sleep, waking up often during the night, and frequent tiredness are common indications of sleep apnea, so even if you have not been diagnosed with the condition, be sure to mention these symptoms to your provider. This will help your anesthesiologist or CRNA make informed decisions about the type of anesthesia medication that may be best for your situation.

Remember that the anesthesia chosen for you is based on many factors, including your physical condition, the nature of the surgery, and your reactions to medications. Frank and open discussion with your anesthesia professional is key in the selection of the right anesthetic for you.