Learning About Peripheral Nerve Blocks and I.V. Regional Anesthesia

During a surgery or a procedure on a part of the body, such as a hand or foot, or for pain control for total joint replacements, such as of the knee or of the hip, your medical care team may use regional anesthesia.

There are a few types of regional anesthesia.

This video describes two types of regional anesthesia used to block pain to an area of the body: peripheral nerve blocks and intravenous (I.V.) regional anesthesia.

A peripheral nerve block is given as a shot near a specific nerve or group of nerves.

It blocks pain in the part of the body—such as an arm or leg—that's supplied by that nerve or nerve group.

Now I.V. regional anesthesia, sometimes called a Bier block, may be used for smaller areas, such as the hand or wrist.

Let's first find out how a peripheral nerve block is usually done.

You'll probably be awake while the anesthesia specialist places the block.

This is so they can communicate with you during the block procedure.

To see the area of the nerve or group of nerves, the anesthesia specialist will usually use an ultrasound.

After finding the right spot, the anesthesia specialist uses a tiny needle to numb the skin and the area beneath the skin.

Then the needle for the nerve block is put into the numbed area.

The specialist injects numbing medicine near the nerve or nerve group.

This causes the "block."

After getting the block, you'll likely get medicines to help you relax and feel sleepy.

Most people are in a light sleep during the surgery and don't remember much.

Depending on the procedure or surgery though, you may stay awake.

But your anesthesia specialist will make sure you are comfortable.

For I.V. regional anesthesia, the anesthesia specialist places a small tube into a vein in the hand of the arm that will be numbed.

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Then they tightly wrap the arm from the hand up to above the area where the procedure will be done.

This pushes blood out of the wrapped section back into the body.

A tight band is put around the arm at the top of the wrap.

When the band is secure, the wrap is removed.

Most of the blood stays above the band.

Then the anesthesia specialist injects numbing medicine into the I.V.

The medicine spreads below the band throughout the arm.

Anesthetics can affect the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system, and the respiratory system.

Anesthesia specialists will watch and care for you to keep you safe and comfortable.

Now after the surgery or procedure, here's what you can expect.

You may feel some of the effects of regional anesthesia for a while.

It can take time for the numbing effects of the medicine to completely wear off.

Before getting a peripheral nerve block or I.V. regional anesthesia, your doctor will examine you to check for anything that could affect your care.

They'll also discuss any risks and how you may feel after the anesthesia.

Tell your anesthesia specialist about any health problems—such as sleep apnea—and any past surgeries.

Also tell them if a family member has had problems with anesthesia.

And tell the specialist about all the medicines and natural health products you take.

Let them know if you're pregnant or if you smoke.

And if you do smoke, try to stop smoking for at least 1 month before your procedure.

This might be a good time to try to quit for good.

And here's something else you can prepare for.

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Your anesthesia specialist may ask you a lot of questions.

They're not asking to judge you or invade your privacy.

They are asking because they want to keep you safe.

For example, if you use marijuana, opioids, or other drugs, let them know.

They may need to adjust your medicines to keep you safe.

They will keep your information confidential.

Now, if your surgery or procedure involves staying at the hospital, remember to bring the things that you need to help you sleep, such as a CPAP machine if you use one.

Thinking about getting anesthesia may be stressful.

But knowing that your anesthesia specialist and the rest of your medical care team are trained and focused on helping you stay safe can help.

And if you have any questions or concerns, you can always talk to your anesthesia specialist.

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