

Learning About Anesthesia for Your Child

If your child needs surgery, a procedure, or a treatment, you're likely to be worried and concerned.

It can help to know that your medical care team will use anesthesia to help your child feel comfortable, relaxed, and free from pain.

You can make a real difference in how your child feels before getting anesthesia by helping your child prepare for it.

One way to help is to talk to your child.

Explain in simple language why they will be getting anesthesia.

Let your child know that anesthesia is one of the ways to control pain and keep them comfortable during a procedure or surgery.

A child's imagination can be powerful, especially when the child is worried or afraid.

So you may want to avoid words like "put to sleep," "shot," or "needle."

Instead, consider words like "take a nap" or "tiny tube in a vein."

And remember that young children don't need too many details.

You can talk to your doctor about what type of anesthesia your child may get.

The type can depend on the surgery or procedure.

But it also can be based on your child's health or test results.

Here are the types of anesthesia your child may get and that your doctor may talk to you about.

General anesthesia affects your child's whole body.

Your child may get it through an intravenous (I.V.) tube, it may be inhaled, or both.

Your child will be unaware of any pain.

And then there's regional anesthesia.

With this type, an injection of numbing medicine is used to block pain to a specific area of the body.

Learning About Anesthesia for Your Child

Examples of regional anesthesia include spinal, epidural, and peripheral nerve blocks.

There's also sedation, a medicine or a combination of medicines delivered through an I.V.

This helps your child relax or fall asleep so that they won't feel any pain.

Sometimes sedation and regional anesthesia may be used together.

"Local" anesthesia is a medicine or an injection usually done to numb a small area of the body.

Before your child gets any type of anesthesia, your anesthesia specialist will check for anything that could affect their anesthesia care.

And your doctor will discuss any risks and how your child may feel after the anesthesia.

For example, your child may need more time to rest.

It takes time for the effects of the medicine to wear off.

Tell your anesthesia specialist about any health problems your child has and if your child has had any other surgeries.

Also, let the specialist know if a family member has had problems with anesthesia.

And tell the care team about the medicines and natural health products your child takes.

And here's something else you can prepare for.

Your anesthesia specialist may ask you and—depending on your child's age—your child a lot of questions.

They're not asking to judge you or your child.

They are asking because they want to keep your child safe.

For example, if you suspect that your child uses tobacco, marijuana, opioids, or any other drugs, let the anesthesia specialist know.

They may need to adjust your child's medicines to keep your child safe.

They will keep this information confidential.

Learning About Anesthesia for Your Child

Some hospital care teams include a child life specialist.

If yours does, this person can help you and your child understand and prepare for the anesthesia.

And if the hospital staff says it's okay, let your child pick out things to bring to the hospital that can help comfort them before and after the procedure.

Now, if your child's surgery or procedure involves staying at the hospital, remember to bring the things your child needs to help them sleep, such as a CPAP machine if they use one or maybe their blanket or a stuffed toy.

Thinking about your child "going under"

or being away from your child while they're getting anesthesia may be stressful.

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

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