

Learning About Peripheral Nerve Blocks for Your Child

If your child needs surgery, a procedure, or a treatment, you may be worried or concerned.

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

There are a few types of regional anesthesia. This video describes peripheral nerve blocks.

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.

Besides preventing pain during a surgery, procedure, or treatment, a peripheral nerve block also can help manage pain afterward.

In addition to a peripheral nerve block, your child will get medicines to help them feel sleepy or go to sleep.

This is done using sedation or general anesthesia.

Here's how a peripheral nerve block is usually done.

Your child will most likely be asleep before the anesthesia specialist places the block.

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 specialist injects numbing medicine near the nerve or nerve group.

This causes the "block."

Anesthetics can affect the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system, and the respiratory system. But don't worry.

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

Before a peripheral nerve block, your child's doctor will check for anything that could affect your child's anesthesia care.

And the 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 some medicines to completely wear off.

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Tell the 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.

The anesthesia specialist may ask you and—depending on your child's age— your child a lot of questions that may seem personal.

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

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

For example, if you think your child might use 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.

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 getting anesthesia and being away from you during a surgery or procedure may be stressful.

But knowing that the 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 the anesthesia specialist.