

Learning About Spinal, Epidural, and Caudal Anesthesia 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.

Spinal, epidural, and caudal anesthesia are used to block pain from an entire area of your child's body.

These types of anesthesia are often used for surgeries on the belly, pelvis, or legs.

And they may be used to control pain after a surgery.

Your child will be given medicine to make them sleepy and will be asleep before the anesthesia is placed near the spine.

For spinal anesthesia, a single shot of medicine is given near the spinal cord.

This offers quick pain relief.

For epidural anesthesia, medicine is usually given through a small, thin tube—a catheter—that's inserted into the area near the spinal cord.

The tube stays in your child's back to supply the numbing medicine.

This offers pain relief for longer periods of time.

Sometimes spinal and epidural anesthesia are used together.

Caudal anesthesia is a type of epidural.

The medicine is given in a shot very low in the back, at the tailbone. Sometimes a catheter is also placed.

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

Your child may feel a little dizzy, unsteady, or tired.

Babies often sleep more than usual. Some children may feel nauseated and may vomit.

So your child might get medicine that can help.

Your child may also have itching, nausea, or shivering.

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And your child may be sore at the injection site. All of these things are normal after anesthesia.

Now, let's learn about preparing for anesthesia.

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

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

For example, if you think 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.

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.

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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 or 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.