Anesthesia and You

What is Anesthesia?

The word "Anesthesia" means "without sensation". If you are having surgery, most likely you will need Anesthesia. An Anesthesiologist (a Specialist Medical Doctor) will give you the anesthetic for your surgery. Anesthetic care by your Anesthesiologist helps you to undergo the surgery safely and with minimal discomfort.

When do I meet my Anesthesiologist?

Most healthy patients will see their Anesthesiologist on the day of surgery. Patients with medical problems such as heart disease, lung disease or diabetes are seen before their surgery by their Anesthesiologist in the Pre-admission/Pre-anesthetic Clinic. Your Surgeon will organize the appointment for this clinic if you need one.

What does the Anesthesiologist do?

The Anesthesiologist will provide you with the anesthetic care for your surgery. He/she will suggest the type of anesthetic that is best for you, depending on your medical condition and type of surgery. He/she will keep you anesthetized and will monitor your important body functions such as breathing, heart rate and blood pressure during your entire surgery. He/she will also supervise your recovery from anesthesia and your initial postoperative pain control in the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU).

Your Anesthesiologist can also provide pain relief to maternity patients in labour (Epidural), care of critically ill patients following surgery in Intensive Care Units, acute pain management (Patient Controlled Analgesia, etc.) and chronic pain management.

How do I prepare for my anesthetic?

Improving your general health can help you heal faster. You should stop smoking as soon as possible, ideally eight weeks before surgery. Do not consume any alcohol in the 12 hours before surgery. Stop all recreational drug use. Stop herbal remedies six weeks before surgery.

You must have an empty stomach before receiving an anesthetic. Having an empty stomach will reduce the risk of vomiting any undigested food and potentially inhaling it into your lungs. You will receive instructions as to when you should stop eating and drinking.

You will receive instructions to let you know which of your regular medications you should take on the day of surgery.

It is important to follow all instructions given to you before your surgery. For your own safety, your surgeon or anesthesiologist may need to cancel your surgery if you do not follow the instructions.

What types of anesthesia are there?

There are three main types of anesthesia.

1. General Anesthesia: It is started by injecting an anesthetic into the intravenous or by breathing a gas anesthetic from a mask. It makes you unconscious. Usually, once you are asleep, the anesthesiologist will insert a tube in your windpipe to help you breathe. You should not feel pain or remember anything during surgery.

2. Regional anesthesia: It blocks pain in a specific area of your body such as an arm or leg. If you wish you may remain awake throughout the procedure or you can receive sedatives in your IV to help you relax. If you are having spinal or epidural anesthesia, local anesthetic is injected near the nerves in your back.

3. Local Anesthesia is given to block pain only to the surgical site. It may be given with sedation if necessary.
What precautions do I have to take after anesthesia?

If you are going home the same day of your surgery, you must have someone to drive you home from the hospital. You should not drive, drink alcohol, make important decisions or use dangerous equipment for 24 hours. It is essential that a responsible adult stays with you overnight following a general anesthetic.

What are the risks of anesthesia?

Modern anesthesia has become very safe. However, general and regional anesthesia can rarely be associated with serious complications (such as death, brain or nerve damage) in a very small number of patients. Minor problems may include sore throat, nausea, vomiting or dizziness. Other uncommon problems may include allergic reactions to drugs and awareness during general anesthesia.

During general anesthesia, placement of the tube into the windpipe can be difficult in some patients. Rarely, this may result in damage to the teeth. Advise your anesthesiologist before surgery of any loose, broken or capped teeth that you may have. All possible precautions will be taken to reduce the risk of damaging your teeth, however damage may still occur.

Spinal or epidural anesthesia may be associated with a small chance of headache. All regional blocks (including spinal and epidural) can rarely cause infection, bleeding, temporary nerve irritation or nerve damage.

Your anesthesiologist will be happy to discuss these risks with you and answer any questions about your anesthetic.

Care After a Local Anaesthetic with Sedation

- Do not drive for 24 hours after a procedure, even though you feel normal. The medicine, which was used to relax you, will work for 24 hours. This medicine reduces your ability to make decisions and your reflexes:
  - DO NOT work with machines or power tools
  - DO NOT drink any alcohol (including beer and wine)
  - DO NOT make important decisions (sign important papers)
  - HAVE someone stay with you for the rest of the day or available to call if needed.

1. You may have some pain. A prescription for pain may be given by the doctor-please take as directed.

2. Your diet should start with liquids, soup and crackers then solid foods.

3. Call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency department if:
   a) fever over 38°C the day after your procedure
   b) medicine has not worked or pain is severe.
   c) you have any extra bleeding
   d) increasing puffiness at the site of your operation
   e) continuing nausea and vomiting

4. If your problem is urgent and are not able to contact your doctor, please go to the nearest Emergency.

Prescription:  □ YES  □ NO   Follow-up appointment:_______________________________________