



*Answers  
about  
Anesthesia*

*Procedures  
and  
Risks*

# Answers *about* Anesthesia

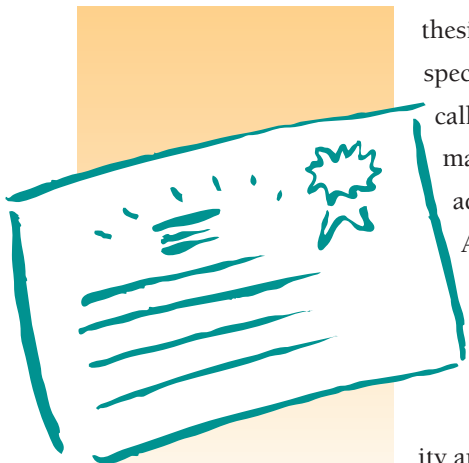
## *Procedures and Risks*

This pamphlet is designed to provide you with information about anesthesia for your upcoming operation. It explains who administers it, the types of anesthesia available, and some of the risks associated with anesthesia care. This pamphlet is not intended as a substitute for a thorough discussion with your anesthesia provider.

### ADVANCES IN ANESTHESIOLOGY

Anesthesiologists are medical doctors whose education has kept pace with their expanding role in our health care system. Following college and medical school, all anesthesiologists enter a four-year residency training program to specialize in

the field of anesthesiology. Highly specialized training, called fellowships, may follow for additional years. Anesthesiologists undergo rigorous certification examinations, and the majority are certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology.



Anesthesiologists provide medical care and consultations in many settings and situations. Here are just a few examples:

- Anesthesiologists provide patient care throughout the surgical experience. This care includes medically evaluating the patient before surgery, consulting with the surgical team, providing pain control and support of life functions during surgery, and supervising care immediately after surgery.
- Because of their specialty training, anesthesiologists are uniquely qualified to prescribe and administer therapies for managing pain outside of the operating room. For example, some anesthesiologists are actively involved in the management of chronic and cancer pain conditions.
- For childbirth, they provide pain relief for the mother while taking into consideration the safety of the baby.
- Anesthesiologists are often leaders in the intensive care unit (ICU) of modern medical centers, where they help to restore critically ill patients to a stable condition.

## THE ANESTHESIA CARE TEAM

In some hospitals and surgery centers, anesthesiologists are part of a team that includes nurse anesthetists or anesthesia physician assistants. These highly trained individuals may be involved in your anesthesia care under the supervision of your anesthesiologist before, during, and immediately after your surgery.

## THE PREOPERATIVE VISIT

An anesthesiologist will meet with you and review your medical record prior to surgery. During this discussion you will be asked what may seem like routine questions. Your answers to these questions will be **very important** in determining what type of anesthetic is to be used and what special precautions may be necessary.

The anesthesiologist must know when you last had anything to eat or drink. It is very important that you have an “empty stomach” during surgery and anesthesia. Be sure to follow the instructions regarding food intake provided by your surgeon or surgical facility.



The anesthesiologist will review your medications, allergies, and past serious illnesses. He or she will also review any problems that you or members of your family may have had during or after previous operations.

## TYPES OF ANESTHESIA

Anesthetic options will be discussed during the preoperative interview.

There are four main categories of anesthesia: sedation, general, regional, and local.

**Sedation** involves the use of intravenous medications that provide relaxation and pain control. The level of sedation, including conscious sedation, is adjusted by the anesthesiologist as necessary. This is the most common type of anesthesia care in outpatient settings.

With **general anesthesia**, you are unconscious and have no awareness of the surgical procedure or other sensations. General anesthesia is produced by medications that are given intravenously (in a vein) and by medications that are inhaled through a mask or a special breathing passageway through the nose or mouth.

If you have **regional anesthesia**, your anesthesiologist will inject a medication near a cluster of nerves to numb the region of your body that requires surgery. There





are several types of regional anesthetics. Epidural and spinal anesthetics are types of regional anesthesia involving the placement of numbing medication through the skin of the lower back in order to numb the nerves of the

abdomen and legs. Plexus or nerve blocks are types of injections that are used to numb portions of extremities (arms, hands, legs, feet). During regional anesthesia, you may remain awake, or you may also receive sedation or general anesthesia.

**Local anesthesia** involves the placement of numbing medication into the skin and tissues to numb the area of the surgical incision. Sedation is often used to supplement local anesthesia.

## RISKS OF ANESTHESIA

The safety of anesthetic procedures has improved dramatically in recent years, and it is unlikely that you will experience any complications of your anesthesia care. Nonetheless, anesthesiologists feel that it is important for you to be informed of the possible risks of anesthesia and of the complications that sometimes occur.

Most problems resulting from anesthesia

are minor and temporary. Here are some examples of such problems:

- Sometimes positioning on the operating bed can cause soreness from stretching of muscles, ligaments, and nerves.
- With general anesthesia, a tooth may be injured during the placement of the breathing passageway.
- With spinal anesthesia, a temporary headache may occur.

More serious complications of anesthesia are rare, but do occur. For example, unexpected reactions to the anesthetic agents could cause seizures, severe drops in blood pressure, or cardiac arrest. When such rare events occur, treatment is immediately instituted in an effort to avoid permanent problems. However, in rare instances, complications of anesthesia can cause severe and permanent injuries, including nerve injury, paralysis, brain damage, and even death.

Each type of anesthesia has benefits and risks, and each patient reacts to and tolerates anesthesia somewhat differently. It is your right and responsibility to ask questions about your anesthesia care. Feel free to ask your anesthesiologist for information about the anesthetic plan, associated risks, and possible complications.

I have read and understand the information  
contained in the brochure

*Answers about Anesthesia:  
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*Signature:*

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*Date:*

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