



Children and Anesthesia

Having surgery or a medical procedure can make anyone anxious. But when it's your child, it adds a whole new level of anxiety, and that's normal. Rest assured that your child's care team — including the physician anesthesiologist — will take good care of your child and keep him or her safe before, during, and after the procedure or surgery. Knowing what to expect also can calm your fears, so you can reduce your child's anxiety and help speed recovery.

Your child may have surgery in the hospital and spend the night, or might have a procedure in an outpatient facility and go home the same day. Either way, anesthesia will help ensure your child is comfortable.

Who Will Provide Anesthesia to Your Child?

Anesthesia today is very safe. The most important thing you can do to reduce the already minimal risks is to be sure your child's anesthesia care is led by a physician anesthesiologist. A physician anesthesiologist is a medical doctor who specializes in anesthesia, pain, and critical care medicine and works with your child's other physicians to develop and administer the anesthesia care plan. With 12 to 14 years of education and 12,000 to 16,000 hours of clinical training, these highly trained medical specialists help ensure safe, high-quality care.

There are several different types of anesthesia, and your child may receive one or more for the procedure or surgery. If your child requires tests, such as a special type of X-ray or other imaging exam, the physician anesthesiologist may provide anesthesia to ensure your child's safety and the success of the test.

How Will the Physician Anesthesiologist Care for Your Child?

Physician anesthesiologists understand that children often are frightened about medical procedures and surgery. The physician anesthesiologist will work with you, your child, and the other doctors and nurses before, during, and after the procedure to calm fears and ensure safety and comfort.

Before Surgery — You'll meet with the physician anesthesiologist to discuss what type of anesthesia will be used and how it will be given. You'll also have the chance to ask any questions about potential side effects and your child's experience during surgery and recovery. The physician anesthesiologist will review your child's health history and ask questions such as:

- Does your child have allergies or asthma?
- Has anyone in the family had a bad reaction to anesthesia?
- Has your child had anesthesia before? If so, what was the experience like?

Knowing more about your child's health helps the physician anesthesiologist make decisions about your child's care to help ensure the procedure or surgery will go smoothly and be successful. Important directions will be given to you about what your child may eat or drink before the procedure and what medications should be taken. Some children need medicine to help calm them before surgery, while others do not. Your physician anesthesiologist will work closely with you and your child to determine if that would be helpful.

During Surgery — The physician anesthesiologist will provide medications to make your child comfortable and pain-free. Depending on what works best for your child, the medication will either be given through an intravenous (IV) line or through a mask that lets your child inhale the medication. Your child will be closely monitored throughout the entire procedure for changes in heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure, and, if needed, adjustments in the anesthesia will be made to keep your child safe and comfortable.

What to tell your child before surgery

Be honest but confident. Nothing soothes a child like a confident parent. Calmly tell your child what to expect, explaining that the procedure or surgery is important and he or she will be well cared for.

It won't be like home. Explain that the hospital or outpatient clinic is different from home and your child may be taken through many rooms and hallways on the way to and from the procedure. Emphasize that even though you will not be with your child every minute, you will be waiting nearby.

Doctors and nurses are friendly. Tell your child that the nurses and doctors — including the physician anesthesiologist — are there to help.

It's normal to have some pain or feel a little sick afterward. Tell your child he or she might be sore after the surgery and feel a little sick, but that is normal and will go away. The physician anesthesiologist will provide medicine to help make your child feel better as quickly as possible.

After Surgery — It's hard to predict how long your child will take to recover from anesthesia after a procedure or surgery. Some children are fully alert right away and others will be groggy for a few hours afterward. Nausea and vomiting also sometimes occur as a side effect from anesthesia. Once the procedure is over, your child's pain will continue to be controlled. The physician anesthesiologist will determine the safest and most effective pain control method to make your child's recovery as comfortable as possible. This could include medication given by mouth, through an IV with a pump that your child controls, or injection of local anesthetics around nerves (an epidural or peripheral nerve block).

About the American Society of Anesthesiologists®

Every day in hospitals, medical centers, ambulatory surgery centers, and physicians' offices across the nation, physician anesthesiologist members of the American Society of Anesthesiologists® provide the highest quality, safest anesthesia care to patients facing surgery or seeking relief from pain. For more information on the field of anesthesiology, visit the American Society of Anesthesiologists online at asahq.org. To learn more about how physician anesthesiologists ensure patient safety, visit asahq.org/madeforthismoment.