

What is anesthesia?

General anesthesia is a term that means your child will seem deeply asleep and not moving or having pain. Your child should not remember their procedure or surgery.

Who is the pediatric anesthesiologist?

The pediatric anesthesiologist is the doctor responsible for keeping your child safe, asleep, and comfortable during the surgery and in the recovery room. Your surgeon and anesthesiologist work together to give the best and safest care for your child. **An anesthesia provider will monitor your child's breathing, heart rate, and oxygen the entire time.**

What can I expect a few days before surgery?

A nurse will call you before the day of surgery. They will talk about things you need to know for the day of surgery. Ask any questions you have during that call. Tell the nurse if your child has been feeling sick. If your child has been sick, it may affect their surgery. Some patients with a lot of medical history may need to be seen in the pre-op clinic before surgery. Your team will let you know if your child needs to be seen.

Why can't my child eat or drink before surgery?

It is very important for your child's safety that their stomach is empty. We know this can be hard for you and your child. Your child's stomach does not work the usual way during surgery. This can make a child throw up during surgery, which can cause problems. To keep your child safe it is best to have nothing in their stomach.

What can I expect the day of surgery?

All patients and families meet their anesthesiologist on the day of surgery. The anesthesiologist will ask you some questions about your child's recent health. They will also do an exam, like listening to your child's heart and lungs. This is a good time to ask your anesthesiologist any questions. After you talk with this doctor, the staff will help get your child ready to go to the operating room.

Will my child get medicine before the surgery?

Most children don't know why they need surgery. Sometimes leaving their family to go to the surgery can be hard for children. Children older than 7 months may be given a medicine. This helps them feel better and relaxed. This medicine also helps them forget about the stressful parts of surgery. This medicine may help them when they leave you to go to the operating room.

What happens in the operating room?

Your child will be cared for by the physician pediatric anesthesiologist, the surgeon, and the other staff in the operating room. Monitors that watch their lungs and heart will be attached with leads. Your child will get medicine through a mask or an IV that makes them seem asleep. They will be comfortable.

What happens after the surgery?

After surgery your child will be moved to the recovery room. Here your child will have their own nurse who will watch and help them as they wake up. You will get to see your child when they are awake but still sleepy. Your child will get medicines to help with pain or upset stomach if they need it. Your child may be able to have a Popsicle or a drink.

Common concerns after the surgery

- Although the doctor will give medicine to treat pain, it is normal for your child to have some pain after the surgery.
- Your child may feel sick to their stomach or throw up from the anesthesia and the pain medicine. Your team can give other medicines to help.
- It is normal for your child to be upset, feel sad, angry, or crabby after the anesthesia medicine. Children younger than 5 years old most often feel this way. This is normal but not every child feels the same way after the surgery. Most children feel better with time, extra rest and sleep, or other medicines.

FDA warning

The Food and Drug Administration gave a notice in 2016 that said, “Repeated or lengthy use of general anesthetic and sedation drugs during surgeries or procedures in children younger than 3 years ...may affect the development of children’s brains.” This means that children younger than 3 years old who have a lot of anesthesia medicines many times, may have problems with their growing brains.

What you need to know

- Anesthesia medicines need to be used for babies and children who need surgery or painful procedures.
- Some surgeries are very helpful and can’t wait for a child to be older.
- Pain that is not treated can harm children and their growing nervous system.
- Experts think that one short time use of anesthesia medicine is not likely to have bad effects on a child’s behavior or how they learn and grow.
- Research is still being done to learn even more.

For other questions, talk with your surgeon or anesthesiologist.

Other websites that may be helpful

- Research on pediatric anesthesia: Smarttots.org
- FDA warnings about using general anesthetics and sedation: FDA.gov
- Anesthesia basics: KidsHealth.org

ALERT: Call your child’s doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.