



# *X-Plain*

## *General Anesthesia*

### **Reference Summary**

#### **Introduction**

You may be scheduled to have surgery under general anesthesia. This reference summary will help explain the benefits and risks of general anesthesia.

#### **Procedure**

To prevent you from feeling pain during your surgery, your anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will make you fall asleep until the operation is over. During that time, the anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will watch over you and make sure your heart, lungs and kidneys are functioning properly.

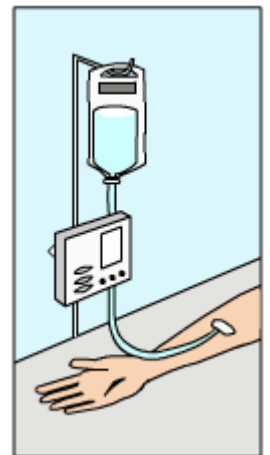
In this reference summary we will use the words anesthesia specialist or anesthesia team to refer to anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists.

Initially, an IV may be placed in your arm or hand to deliver medications. You will then be given medications that will make you fall asleep. From that point on you will not be aware of anything until you wake up at the end of the operation.

Your anesthesia specialist may put a tube into your air pipe, or trachea. The tube will be connected to a respirator. This will allow you to receive adequate oxygen as well as anesthetic gases that will help keep you asleep.

After the operation is done, you will be allowed to wake up. When you are able to breathe on your own, the tube is taken out and you are taken to the recovery room or intensive care unit. Nurses will watch over you until you are fully awake.

Throughout the operation, your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen concentration in the blood are monitored very closely by the anesthesia specialist with the help of medical instruments called monitors.



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## Risks and Complications

Because of significant advances in technology and medications, general anesthesia is extremely safe. There are, however, some possible risks and complications. YOU can do a lot to prevent them.

You should make your anesthesia team aware of any medical problems that you may have such as heart, lung or kidney problems, strokes and liver damage.

Previous blood transfusions, diabetes, high blood pressure, jaundice, depression and other psychiatric disorders should also be reported to your anesthesia specialist.

You should also tell your anesthesia team about any previous experiences with anesthetics and how you reacted to them.

It is also important to tell your doctor whether you have snoring problems, and whether you have any loose teeth or dental work, such as bridges and crowns.

It is also very important to make your anesthesia specialist and surgeon aware of any medications you are taking, even over the counter medications such as aspirin or Advil™. Medications you are taking could interact with the anesthesia medications or could cause excessive bleeding during surgery.

It is also important to tell your doctors whether you have any allergies to drugs, such as numbing medications, or to foods, such as eggs. This allows your doctors to stay away from medications that you may be allergic to.

Because rare reactions to anesthesia may run in families, let your anesthesia team know whether you or ANY member of your family has had any troubles with anesthesia in the past.

You may develop allergic reactions that are discovered during surgery, such as allergies to tape, latex (a substance present in balloons) and iodine-containing solutions.



Nausea and vomiting could occur after surgery. This is usually dealt with by using anti-nausea medications.

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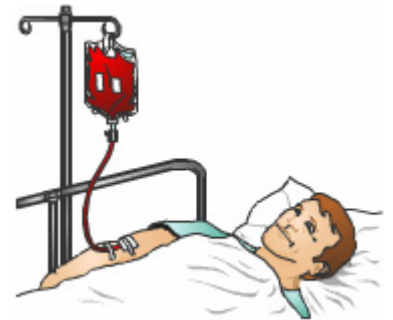
There is a small risk of lung infections, strokes, heart attacks and possibly death during or after anesthesia.

These risks are very small and are more likely in older people and patients who have medical problems and/or a previous history of strokes or heart attacks.

Because the body lies still during surgery, pressure points may develop. If a part of the body has too much pressure on it, this can, rarely, result in nerve damage, paralysis, blindness and skin ulcers, depending on the position you are in during surgery. Precautions are taken to prevent this from happening. Therefore this is very rare.

If excessive bleeding occurs during surgery, the anesthesia specialist, in close consultation with the surgeon, may decide to give you a blood transfusion. This is done only when necessary to keep the patient safe.

This blood is thoroughly tested for known communicable diseases such as hepatitis or AIDS. This blood is very safe, but infections with these known or other unknown diseases could still happen.



If for religious or other reasons you are against blood transfusions even in life threatening situations, make sure to tell your doctors prior to surgery.

Because of the tube being placed in the throat, the throat may feel sore afterwards. While the tube is being placed in the throat, the lips, tongue, teeth and even the vocal cords may be damaged. This is extremely rare.

The site of your IV can rarely become infected. This is may need to be treated with warm cloth applications and, rarely, antibiotics.

Your anesthesia specialist is prepared to treat reactions to medications used in the operating room. In spite of the best effort, in very rare instances these reactions could be fatal. It is therefore very important to inform your anesthesia team of ALL your known allergies.

Be sure to tell your anesthesia specialist if there is any chance you may be pregnant. Special precautions should be taken during the operation.

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## Summary

General anesthesia is very safe. However, as you have learned, there are some risks and possible complications.

Let your doctors know of any new symptoms that you may have after your surgery.

Most of the complications can be prevented through good communication.

Make sure to inform your doctors and anesthesia team of all your medical conditions, medications, allergies and previous anesthetics.



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