

General Anesthesia: Frequently-Asked Questions

The anesthesiologist has decided on general anesthesia with you. This document presents an overview of important information you were given during the pre-anesthesia appointment.

What is general anesthesia?

This is a technique used to eliminate pain during a surgical, obstetrical or medical procedure (endoscopy, radiology, etc.). It is induced by injecting medication or inhaling anesthetic vapors. These substances put you into a state comparable to very deep sleep.

What will the procedure involve?

You will be given custom-tailored anesthesia by specialized doctors and nurses. Before you are brought to the operating room, you may be offered medication to control anxiety.

Your care will start by fitting devices to monitor your vital functions:

- Heart: patches connected to a screen will be attached to your chest.
- Blood pressure: a cuff will be wrapped around one of your arms.
- Breathing: a sensor will be placed on the tip of one of your fingers.

Medication to induce general anesthesia is administered intravenously. To ensure a good oxygen supply to your lungs, the anesthesiologist will ask you to breathe through a mask. During the operation, most people are given artificial breathing assistance. There are two types of assistance: an oxygen mask placed over the mouth and nose and a device inserted into your mouth and respiratory tract (laryngeal mask or endotracheal tube). These devices will be placed during anesthesia. While you are under the anesthetic, an anesthesia professional will monitor your vital functions, including your heart and lungs. The anesthesia will be adapted to your needs.

Once the surgical procedure has ended, medication will no longer be administered, which will lead to your awakening. You will be monitored continuously in the recovery room.

Report any discomfort to the care team.

Note: the doctor responsible for anesthesia during your operation will not necessarily be the person you met during the consultation appointment. However, he/she will have all the information required for your care. He/she may suggest modifying the planned anesthesia technique if necessary.

For your safety, your identity, the type of operation scheduled and the surgical site (the part of the body to be operated on) will be verified several times during your stay. It is crucial that you cooperate actively with these checks.

What are the risks of general anesthesia?

All medical procedures involve risks, even when they are performed by experts. The rate and severity of these risks depend on your state of health, age or general lifestyle.

The anesthesia techniques used are safe. The risks of unexpected and potentially life-threatening complications such as an allergy or severe heart or lung problem are extremely small. All necessary measures will be taken to prevent and treat any complications in the best possible way.

However, the following complications could occur:

- Nausea and vomiting: this occurs after your awakening. Despite the use of new anesthetic drugs, these effects are still common, but are now easier to treat.
- Sore throat, hoarseness, swallowing difficulties: these effects sometimes appear when a device has been inserted into the throat or trachea to help you breathe during anesthesia. They usually disappear within a few days. On very rare occasions, they require further attention due to damage to the vocal cords.
- Dental damage: this can be caused by the procedures required to fit the breathing assistance device.
- Nerve, muscle and skin damage: this is caused by extended periods spent lying on the operating table, which leads to compression. These effects cause temporary numbness or paralysis that is reversible in nearly all cases.
- Memory problems, decreased concentration: this sometimes occurs in the days following the operation and disappears spontaneously.
- Awakening during the operation: this is very rare, but can remain in your memory and should be reported to the anesthesia team.

To improve your safety, please report the following upon your arrival in the operating room:

- Any permanent dental appliances worn and any fragile teeth.
- Any joint pain or position that is normally uncomfortable for you.

Note: there may be other risks if additional treatments or monitoring measures are required. Likewise, the risk connected with the operation itself should be discussed with the surgeon.

If you notice or are concerned by any persistent symptom, make sure to talk with the anesthesia team, your surgeon or your own physician.

What are the necessary safety precautions?

Your cooperation is crucial for the success of the procedure. Please follow the recommendations below:

- Medication: only take medication authorized by the anesthesiologist during the consultation appointment and report any medication taken, including aspirin, anti-inflammatory drugs or blood thinners.
- Dentures, jewelry, contact lenses, piercings or other devices (except hearing aids and glasses if worn) should be removed before your arrival in the operating room.

To reduce the risks of accident or infection caused by gastric fluid entering your lungs, follow the recommendations below:

- Food: do not eat, suck on candy or chew gum less than six hours before the procedure.
- Beverages: stop drinking fluids six hours prior to the procedure; only clear liquids (water or tea) are permitted up to two hours before the procedure; after that time, all beverages are prohibited.
- Smoking: it is advisable to stop smoking at least 12 hours before the procedure.

Note: to limit the risks of theft or loss, only bring in items that are absolutely necessary.

Contact

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Information videos available at: <http://anesthesiologie.hug-ge.ch>