



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → General anesthesia

URL of this page: //medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007410.htm

General anesthesia

General anesthesia is treatment with certain medicines that puts you into a deep sleep-like state so you do not feel pain during surgery. After you receive these medicines, you will not be aware of what is happening around you.

Description

Most times, a doctor called an anesthesiologist will give you the anesthesia. Sometimes, a certified registered nurse anesthetist will give you the anesthesia.

Anesthesia often involves more than one medicine. Some medicines are given into your vein. You may be asked to breathe in (inhale) a special gas through a mask. Once you are asleep, the doctor may insert a tube into your windpipe (trachea) to help you breathe and protect your lungs.

You will be watched very closely while you are asleep. Your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing will be monitored continuously.

You will not move, feel any pain, or have any memory of the procedure because of these medicines.

Why the Procedure is Performed

General anesthesia is a safe way to stay asleep and pain-free during procedures that would:

- Be too painful
- Take a long time
- Affect your ability to breathe
- Make you uncomfortable
- Cause too much anxiety

As an alternative to general anesthesia, you may also be able to have moderate or deep sedation or a regional anesthetic where part of your body is numb for your procedure. Sometimes, though, it is not enough to make you comfortable. Children may need general anesthesia for a medical or dental procedure to manage any pain or anxiety they may feel.

Risks

General anesthesia is usually safe for healthy people. You may have a higher risk of problems with general anesthesia if you:

- Use large amounts of alcohol or other medicines such as sedatives, opioids, or illicit drugs
- Have allergies or a family history of being allergic to medicines
- Have heart, lung, or kidney problems
- Smoke

Ask your doctor about these complications:

- Death (rare)
- Harm to your vocal cords
- Heart attack
- Lung infection
- Mental confusion (temporary)
- Stroke
- Trauma to the teeth or tongue
- Waking during anesthesia (rare)
- Allergy to the medicines
- Malignant hyperthermia (fast rise in body temperature and severe muscle contractions)

Before the Procedure

Tell your surgeon or nurse if:

- You are or could be pregnant
- You are taking any medicines, including medicines, drugs, supplements, or herbs you bought without a prescription

During the week before your surgery:

- You may be asked to temporarily stop taking medicines that keep your blood from clotting. These medicines are called blood thinners. This includes over-the-counter medicines and supplements such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn), and vitamin E. Many prescription medicines are also blood thinners.
- Ask your surgeon which medicines you should still take on the day of surgery.

On the day of surgery:

- Follow instructions about when to stop eating and drinking.
- Take the medicines your surgeon told you to take with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the hospital on time.

After the Procedure

You may wake up tired and groggy in the recovery or operating room. You may also feel sick to your stomach, and have a dry mouth, sore throat, or feel cold or restless until the effect of the anesthesia wears off. Your nurse will monitor these side effects, which will wear off, but it may take a few hours. Sometimes, nausea and vomiting can

be treated with other medicines.

Follow your surgeon's instructions while you recover and care for your surgical wound.

Outlook (Prognosis)

General anesthesia is generally safe because of modern equipment, medicines, and safety standards. Most people recover completely and do not have any complications.

Alternative Names

Surgery - general anesthesia

References

Cohen NH, Gropper MA. Perioperative medicine. In: Gropper MA, Cohen NH, Eriksson LI, Fleisher LA, Johnson-Akeju S, Leslie K, eds. *Miller's Anesthesia*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2025:chap 3.

Hernandez A, Sherwood ER. Anesthesiology principles, pain management, and conscious sedation. In: Townsend CM Jr, Beauchamp RD, Evers BM, Mattox KL, eds. *Sabiston Textbook of Surgery*. 21st ed. St Louis, MO: Elsevier; 2022:chap 14.

Review Date 1/13/2025

Updated by: James Cyriac, MD, Associate Professor of Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine, UC Irvine Health.

Review provided by VeriMed Healthcare Network. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

Learn how to cite this page



Health Content
Provider
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC, for Health Content Provider (www.urac.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.

