

Anesthesia Side Effects

Side effects of anesthesia can occur during a surgery or procedure, or afterward when you are recovering and the anesthesia is wearing off. The possible side effects vary, depending on what kind of anesthesia you have: general, or local. While some side effects that occur after surgery may be uncomfortable or frustrating, most don't last long.

If you've had any of these or other side effects or complications with past procedures, tell your anesthesiologist, who may be able to give you medicine before or after the procedure, or make other adjustments to prevent it from happening again.

General Anesthesia (sedation provided through inhaled or intravenous – IV – medications):

The side effects of general anesthesia can include:

- Nausea & vomiting – This very common side effect can occur within the first few days of having surgery & can be triggered by a number of factors such as medication, motion, and type of surgery.
- Sore throat – The tube that is put in your throat to help you breathe can leave you with a sore throat after it's removed.
- Confusion – Confusion when waking up from surgery is common, but for some people – particularly those who are older – confusion can last for days or weeks.
- Muscle aches – The medications used to relax the muscles so a breathing tube can be inserted can cause soreness.
- Itching – This is a common side effect of narcotics, one type of pain medication sometimes used during general anesthesia.
- Chills and shivering (hypothermia) – This is common when patients regain consciousness after surgery. It can occur in up to half of patients. Researchers aren't sure, but think it might be related to the body cooling down.

Rarely, general anesthesia may cause more serious complications, including:

- Postoperative delirium or cognitive dysfunction – In some cases, confusion and memory loss can last longer than a few hours.
- Delirium – This can last for a few days after surgery. Occasionally, patients can become confused, disoriented or have problems remembering things. It can come and go, and usually disappears after about a week. This condition can be more common when patients are transferred to intensive care after surgery and remain there for several days.
- Cognitive dysfunction – People with heart disease, lung disease, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, or who have had a stroke, may be at risk for long-term memory loss. Their ability to learn, concentrate and think may be lessened.
- Malignant hyperthermia – Some people inherit this serious, potentially deadly reaction to anesthesia that can occur during surgery, causing a quick fever and muscle contractions. If you or your family member has ever had heat stroke, or suffered from the condition in a previous surgery, be sure to tell the physician anesthesiologist.

Regional Anesthesia regional (numbing only part of your body):

The potential side effects of regional anesthesia (such as an epidural or spinal block, in which an anesthetic is injected in the lower back or a peripheral nerve that affects sensation to an area of the body), include:

- Headache – This can occur a few days after the procedure if some of the spinal fluid leaks out.
- Minor back pain – Soreness can happen at the site where the needle was inserted into the back.
- Difficulty urinating – Because the area below the waist is numbed, it may be difficult to urinate.
- Hematoma – Bleeding beneath the skin can occur where the anesthesia was injected.

Serious but rare complications include:

- Pneumothorax – When anesthesia is injected near the lungs, the needle may accidentally enter the lung. This could cause the lung to collapse and require a chest tube to be inserted.
- Nerve damage – Although very rare, nerve damage can occur, causing temporary or permanent pain.

Local Anesthesia Injection (numbing a small area):

Injection of local anesthesia numbs just the part of your body requiring minor surgery or a procedure. Side effects are minimal and usually are related to how much anesthesia is injected.