



Recovering at Home After Anesthesia

This handout gives activity guidelines to follow after anesthesia. It also explains what side effects are normal after anesthesia and when you should call for help.

If you have any of these symptoms, call 9-1-1 right away:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pressure or heaviness
- A change in your mental status (feeling confused) or being unable to speak normally
- A change in your facial expressions
- New weakness or numbness

What to Expect

You will finish your recovery at home. You may feel drowsy and have minor side effects after your procedure or surgery with anesthesia. These side effects include:

- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Dizziness off and on
- Nausea
- Vomiting (rarely)

Some of these symptoms may be from the pain medicine you are taking. The side effects from anesthesia usually go away quickly in the hours after your procedure. Still, it may take several days for your body to recover from the stress of surgery and anesthesia.

If you received a “nerve block” type of anesthesia in your arm, leg, ankle, or anywhere else, you will be told when the numbness should wear off and when to start your oral pain medicine. Be careful with how you use and move the numb part of your body. While it is numb, it may not have as much feeling or be as strong as it normally is.

If you feel nauseated, drink only clear liquids until the nausea passes. Call your doctor if your nausea does not go away.

Getting Home

You must have a responsible person take you home. It is against the law to drive if you are impaired in any way. Protect yourself and others by making arrangements for an escort or driver before your procedure. If you have any questions about this policy, please call your provider.

Medicines

Do not take any medicines unless they were prescribed or approved by your doctor. Normally, you will be able to start taking your usual medicines right away. If you have questions, please ask the doctor who prescribed your medicines.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

For questions about your anesthetic care: Call Anesthesiology at 206-598-4260, weekdays 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

After hours and on weekends and holidays: Call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Anesthesia Resident on call to be paged.

For questions about your procedure or medicines: Call your doctor:

Dr. _____

What to Do and Not Do

You have had general or regional anesthesia, or local anesthesia with *intravenous* (IV) sedation. Follow these instructions for at least 24 hours, or for as long as you are taking narcotic pain medicines:

Do NOT:

- Drive a car or use machinery
- Drink alcohol
- Make important legal or personal decisions
- Be responsible for the care of another person

Do:

- Stay home for the day and rest
- Have an adult stay with you
- Drink liquids at first, then progress slowly to your usual diet
- Arrange for someone to care for your children or others you are responsible for, at least for the day of your surgery
- Move carefully while you are taking narcotic pain medicine (you may feel dizzy if you make sudden moves)
- Protect any numb limbs from pressure, heat, cold, or anything else that could harm them

Urinary Retention

Urinary retention (not being able to urinate) may occur after some procedures. If you are unable to urinate within 8 hours of going home after your procedure, or if your bladder feels painful and full, call your doctor. Allowing your bladder to get too full can cause serious problems. You may need to go to the emergency room for treatment.

After Spinal and Epidural Anesthesia

- You may have mild lower back pain after spinal or epidural anesthesia.
- Rarely, patients develop a headache that is present when they are upright, but decreases or disappears when they lie down. If you have a headache like this, call one of the numbers shown on the left. Anesthesia staff will assess your symptoms and recommend treatment as needed.

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