

Recovering at Home After Anesthesia

What to expect and when to call

This handout explains self-care after having anesthesia. It tells what side effects are normal and when to call for help.

Getting Home

You must have a responsible adult take you home after your procedure.

It is against the law to drive until the drug has fully worn off.

Before your procedure, plan for an escort or driver. If you have any questions, please call your healthcare provider.



A responsible adult must take you home after your procedure.

What to Expect

You may feel sleepy and have these symptoms after having anesthesia:

- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Dizziness that comes and goes
- Vomiting (rare)

These side effects usually ease within hours after your procedure. But, it may take days for your body to recover from the stress of surgery. Some of your symptoms may also be from the pain medicine you are taking.

Nerve Block Anesthesia

If you received a “nerve block” anesthesia, we will tell you when the numbness should wear off and when to start taking your pain pills. 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 usual.

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

Retaining Urine

Some patients have *urinary retention* (cannot pee) after a procedure. If you still cannot urinate 8 hours after your procedure, or if your bladder feels painful and full, call your provider. If your bladder gets too full, it can cause serious problems. You may need to go to the emergency room for treatment.

Medicines

Do not take any medicines unless your provider prescribed or approved them. Most patients can start taking their usual medicines right away. If you have questions about when to resume taking your medicines, ask the doctor who prescribed them.

Pain After Spinal or Epidural Anesthesia

It is normal to have mild pain in your lower back after spinal or epidural anesthesia. Some patients have a headache when they are upright, that eases when they lie down. If you have a headache like this, call one of the numbers in the “Questions” box. We may advise treatment, if needed.

Self-care

For at least 24 hours **and** while you are taking opioid pain medicines:

Do NOT:

- Drive a car or use machines
- Drink alcohol
- Make important decisions or sign legal papers
- Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

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
- Plan 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 opioids (you may feel dizzy if you make sudden moves)
- Protect any numb limbs from pressure, heat, cold, or anything else that could harm them

When to Call

Call 911 **right away** if you have any of these symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- A feeling of pressure or weight on your chest
- You feel confused, or you cannot speak normally
- A change in your face or how you move your mouth
- New weakness or numbness

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

For questions about your anesthesia care:

Weekdays 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., call the Pre-Anesthesia Clinic at 206.598.6334.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the Anesthesia Resident on call.

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

Dr. _____