

Spinal Block for Infants

What is a spinal block?

A spinal block (spinal anesthesia) is one type of anesthesia for infants. This is a type of nerve block that will numb and prevent movement from the waist down. A spinal block will control pain during and after your child's surgery. With this approach, infants are not "put under" with a general anesthetic. Babies often fall asleep on their own after a spinal block. Your baby may be able to get a spinal block, but it will depend on their age, health, and the procedure.

How is the spinal block given?

Babies will receive a single injection of numbing medicine into the spinal fluid. This provides a sensory and motor block from the waist down.

What are the benefits of a spinal block?

A spinal block avoids placing a breathing tube, changes in oxygen levels, blood pressure, heart rate, and exposure to anesthesia gases. It can also decrease the amount of morphine-like pain medicine your child may receive. A spinal block can also shorten the time to feeding, time spent in recovery and time away from you.

What is general anesthesia?

General anesthesia is very safe. It involves going to sleep and requires a breathing tube to help infants breathe. The breathing tube is removed at the end of surgery and your baby will wake up in the recovery room.

You can talk to your child's anesthesiologist to decide which option is best for your child.

What will my child feel during a spinal block?

A portion of your child's back will first be numbed with cream before going to the operating room (OR). Once in the OR, we will insert a small needle into the spinal fluid to inject the numbing medicine. Most infants and children fall asleep on their own once numbed.

If your child is still awake, we will offer music, warm blankets, and sugar water or distract them through play. If your child is still having trouble relaxing, we can give other medicines. All children are watched closely by an anesthesia provider after a spinal block.

How do I care for my child after a spinal block?

The numbness will last between 1-2 hours. Foot and leg movement will be the first sign that the spinal block is wearing off. Pain control often lasts long after the spinal block has fully worn off. Follow any restrictions the surgeon gives you.

What are the risks of spinal anesthesia?

Your anesthesiologist will answer all your questions before surgery. Below is a table of possible side effects and how common they are.

Side Effect	How common is it?
Unsuccessful Placement (requires general anesthesia)	5-10 patients in 100
Infection	Rare (less than 3 in 1,000)
Nerve Injury (including paralysis)	Very rare (less than 1 in 10,000)
Bleeding	Very rare (less than 1 in 18,000)

We are committed to making your child's surgery as safe and stress-free as we can. Our goal is to decrease the fear and anxiety you or your child may have by giving you a safe anesthetic option for your child.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8342.