

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

SOAP
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Information for Patients about Anesthesia for your Cesarean Delivery

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What type of anesthesia is used for a cesarean delivery?

For cesarean deliveries, a spinal or an epidural are typically used for anesthesia. Both spinals and epidurals allow you to be awake during the birth of your baby. They are placed in your back using medications that prevent you from feeling the pain of the surgery. These medications block the sensation of sharp pain, however, you will still feel touch and pressure during the surgery. Sometimes we use general anesthesia, where you are completely asleep, but this is only used in specific situations.

How is the anesthesia procedure done? Does it hurt? Is it dangerous to move? How long does it take?

Both the spinal and epidural procedures are similar, done with you seated on the edge of your bed or lying on your side. A small needle is used to put numbing medicine in your skin. Next, the epidural or spinal needle is used to find the correct space in your back. During the procedure, you may feel pressure or discomfort in your back. The procedure usually takes about 15-20 minutes but can sometimes take longer. The most important part of the procedure is to be in the proper position, which is making your back curve like the letter "c", or the shape of a scared cat.

What are the risks?

Serious risks from spinals and epidurals are very rare and include a blood collection or infection in the spine and nerve damage (1 in 50,000 to 1 in a million). Less serious risks include a bad headache (1 in 100

to 1 in 500), failed pain relief needing a repeat procedure (1 in 10 to 1 in 50) and complications from too much medication (1 in 4,000 to 1 in 5,000).

What are the side effects?

Possible side effects are a drop in your blood pressure, itching, fever, temporary heaviness in the legs, and soreness in the back for a few days. Long lasting back pain is NOT caused by spinals or epidurals, but is common after any pregnancy.

I do not want to feel anything during my cesarean delivery. Will I?

While spinal and epidural anesthesia blocks pain sensations during surgery, you may feel pressure at different times during your cesarean delivery. Your anesthesia team will also monitor you during your entire cesarean delivery to make sure you stay comfortable.

How will I get pain relief after my cesarean delivery?

Long-acting pain medication is usually given in your spinal or epidural to help with the pain after your cesarean delivery. It should help the surgical pain for the first 24 hours afterwards. It is usually given along with IV or oral pain medications.

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