

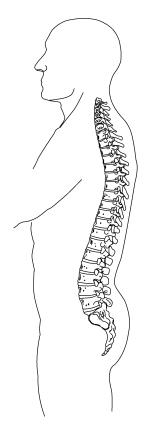
Spinal anesthesia for your joint replacement surgery

Soon you will be coming into hospital for your new knee or hip. This is called joint replacement surgery. You may be anxious about the anesthesia you will receive during surgery.

There are 2 options of anesthesia: general and spinal. Spinal anesthesia may be safer and carry less risks for some patients than general anesthesia.

This handout describes spinal anesthesia. We hope it will answer your questions. Please take some time to read it before your visit with the Anesthesiologists in the Pre-op Clinic. During this visit, please feel free to discuss your concerns and your options about anesthesia.

Spinal anesthesia



What is spinal anesthesia?

Spinal anesthesia involves the placement of a very small needle into the area of the back that contains spinal fluid. Freezing medicine is injected into the spinal fluid and the needle is removed. The medicine makes you numb from the waist down.

Is a spinal anesthetic painful?

Most patients tolerate spinal anesthesia very well. Freezing medicine is placed into the skin in the lower back before the needle is inserted. The freezing is usually the most uncomfortable part: it feels like the freezing that you might receive at the dentist's office.

Why should I have a spinal anesthetic?

Most patients having joint replacement surgery have a spinal anesthetic. It is very well tolerated by patients and avoids the need for a general anesthetic. It also reduces the risk of bleeding and blood clots. We also believe that spinal anesthesia is less stressful on the body, including the heart and lungs.

What are the risks?

The risks are very small, most occurring in less than 1 in 100 patients that receive a spinal anesthetic.

The risks include:

- bad headache
- decreased blood pressure
- infection or bleeding in the area where the needle is placed
- a very very small risk of nerve damage

I have back problems. Can I still have a spinal anesthetic?

Many patients are concerned that a spinal anesthetic may worsen their back problems. Depending on the nature of your back problem, spinal anesthesia may still be an option. Most of our patients having joint replacements have arthritis in their backs as well and still receive spinal anesthetics without a problem.

Sometimes it may be more difficult to find the right area to place the spinal needle, and it may take a longer time to do the spinal. If you have back problems please discuss this with your Anesthesiologist in your pre-op visit.

Does this mean I will be awake during my surgery?

Although you will not be having a full general anesthetic, you will receive sedation or relaxation medicine during the surgery. You will not be aware of what is happening during surgery. You will be awake during the placement of the spinal anesthetic for safety reasons.