Anesthesia for Total Knee Replacement

Your doctor has recommended regional anesthesia for your total knee replacement surgery. This information describes this type of anesthesia and the care needed after its use. Carefully follow any added instructions given to you by your surgeon and nurse.

**Anesthesia Plan**

Anesthesia is used to relax you and to control pain during and after your surgery. Patients may have nausea, vomiting and drowsiness after they wake. However, regional anesthesia, which is administered into the affected area of the body, can help avoid these effects, so that most patients:

- Feel less drowsy.
- Recover faster and start physical therapy sooner.
- Have excellent pain control both during and after the surgery.
- Are less likely to have nausea, vomiting or a sore throat.

**Regional anesthesia** for knee surgery uses:

- A nerve block in the lower back (epidural/spinal anesthesia) that prevents pain during and right after the surgery.
- An IV (into the vein) medication (sedation) to ensure that you are sleepy and very relaxed during surgery.

Often, a small tube (catheter) is placed in the groin area. The tube allows numbing medicine to be given into the site (femoral nerve block). This is done to help:

- Control pain after surgery.
- Allow more pain-free movement.
- Begin therapy sooner, which will aid your recovery.
Keep in mind:
- Regional anesthesia cannot be used for all patients. On the day of surgery, your anesthesiologist will discuss the option that is best for you.
- In some cases, general anesthesia may be needed. This is done only if the nerve block does not control the pain during surgery.
- After surgery, the femoral catheter (along with oral medication) will help ease discomfort when you use the continuous passive motion (CPM) machine to regain normal knee movement.

Procedure
The epidural/spinal anesthesia will be given before your surgery starts. To begin, you will be given an IV medicine to relax you (sedation). Once you are relaxed, numbing medication will be injected into your back near your spine. It causes you to be numb from the waist down during your surgery. The epidural catheter can be used after surgery for pain control overnight. If used, the femoral catheter will be placed either before or after surgery. The pain relief medicine, often started the morning after surgery, will be given through a small, pump-like device.

During Your Stay
On the day of surgery, you will start to take blood-thinning medication (anticoagulant). This helps to prevent blood clots from forming.
The morning after surgery, the epidural catheter will be removed. If you have a femoral catheter, it will remain in place for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. While this catheter is in place and up to 24 hours after it is removed:
- Your leg may be numb.
- You may have some weakness in your leg.
- You will not be able to walk safely by yourself.

To prevent injury, it is very important to ask for help when getting out of bed or walking.

Going Home
Protect Your Leg and Foot
Before you leave the hospital, the numbing effects of the epidural/spinal anesthesia and femoral nerve block will have worn off. Be sure to follow your doctor’s guidelines about the use of pain medicine and activity levels.
**Stay Comfortable**

- You may begin/continue to take your pain medication as needed on a regular basis (every _____ hours, as prescribed by your doctor).
- **Do not wait to feel severe pain.** It is much better to prevent the build-up of pain than to try to stop it once it is there.
- Contact your surgeon about any severe pain not controlled by your medication.

**Special Instructions**

- Have someone at home to help you.
- Carefully follow the instructions given to you by your surgeon and nurse.
- Epidural/spinal anesthesia may cause a headache. If you have a headache after surgery, lie flat on your back and contact your surgeon.

Please feel free to ask the anesthesiologist if you have any questions regarding your anesthesia care.

**Health Information Resources**

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women’s Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.