

Are there different kinds of anesthesia?

There are three main categories of anesthesia: local, regional, and general. Each has many forms and uses.

In local anesthesia, the anesthetic drug is usually injected into the tissue to numb just the specific location of your body requiring minor surgery, for example, on the hand or foot.

In regional anesthesia, your anesthesiologist makes an injection near a cluster of nerves to numb the area of your body that requires surgery. You may remain awake, or you may be given a sedative. You do not see or feel the actual surgery take place. There are several kinds of regional anesthesia. Two of the most frequently used are spinal anesthesia and epidural anesthesia, which are produced by injections made with great exactness in the appropriate areas of the back. They are frequently preferred for childbirth and prostate surgery.

In general anesthesia, you are unconscious and have no awareness or other sensations. There are a number of general anesthetic drugs. Some are gases or vapors inhaled through a breathing mask or tube and others are medications introduced through a vein. During anesthesia, you are carefully monitored, controlled and treated by your anesthesiologist, who uses sophisticated equipment to track all your major bodily functions. A breathing tube may be inserted through your mouth and frequently into the windpipe to maintain proper breathing during this period. The length and level of anesthesia is calculated and constantly adjusted with great precision. At the conclusion of surgery, your anesthesiologist will reverse the process and you will regain awareness in the recovery room.

(Excerpt from the Anesthesia and You section of the ASA Web site
www.asahq.org/patientEducation/anesandyou.htm)