



ANAESTHESIA – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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Type of anaesthesia

You have met with your Maxillofacial and Oral surgeon, and it has jointly been decided that an operation is required for a specific reason. Different types of anaesthesia may have been discussed for your particular needs. Some operations can only be performed under full general anaesthesia in hospital, while other operations can be performed using one of the following techniques:

- Local anaesthesia alone
- Local anaesthesia with conscious sedation

What is meant by “local anaesthesia”?

Local anaesthesia means that your surgeon will use a local aesthetic agent to numb the required surgical field, similar to a dentist’s injection. This technique eliminates pain for a few hours, which enables your surgeon to perform the operation painlessly while you maintain full consciousness. You should be able to drive home yourself and can have anything to eat or drink before the scheduled operation. It is the preferred technique for smaller procedures.

What is meant by “general anaesthesia”?

To understand the concept of general anaesthesia, it is important to understand that different levels of consciousness exist, as is illustrated in the diagram below.

LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

General anaesthesia means that a qualified specialist anaesthetist administers medication that induces a state of deep sleep. This technique is only performed in well-equipped hospital theatres in South Africa. During the “sleep state” all normal vital life functions

are maintained and carefully monitored, while the operation is being performed by your Maxillofacial and Oral Surgeon. A tube is inserted via the nose or mouth to maintain breathing. At the end of the operation the anaesthetist will “reverse” the process and the patient will gradually come around, until full alertness is regained. Operations that are technically demanding or require more intense pain control will generally be performed under general anaesthesia.

Two important practical points about general anaesthesia:

- You are not allowed to have anything to eat or drink for 6 hours before the scheduled operation
- You are not allowed to drive home yourself

WHAT IS MEANT BY “CONSCIOUS SEDATION”?

Conscious sedation implies a state of reduced alertness which is characterized by calmness and drowsiness, but the patient is still awake enough to respond to verbal commands. Conscious sedation can be achieved by means of inhalation gases (inhalation sedation) or intravenous medication (parenteral sedation) administered via an intravenous drip. The latter technique is more often used for oral surgical procedures and can be used for adults as well as children. Parenteral conscious sedation in South Africa is performed by sedationists or specialist anaesthetists in a well-equipped surgery or hospital theatre. The technique is safe, but it is important to remember that certain medical conditions may pose a risk. The Maxillofacial and Oral surgeon is trained to evaluate these factors in order to determine whether conscious sedation is an alternative for you.

The sedationist uses a combination of medication to induce a sleepy, relaxed state of mind, while the surgeon uses local anaesthesia to numb the surgical field in order to eliminate pain. Patients generally find conscious sedation an affordable, pleasant and safe experience with very little side-effects.

After the operation, patients may still be a little drowsy and a recovery period of 20 – 30 minutes is normally necessary. You will be observed in the surgery by a trained staff member during this period.

Two important practical points about conscious sedation:

- You are not allowed to have anything to eat or drink for 6 hours before the scheduled operation
- You are not allowed to drive home yourself

WHICH TECHNIQUE IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ME?

Not all patients or their needs are the same. Some are more nervous than others, some require technically more demanding operations, and some require longer operations. The Maxillofacial and Oral Surgeon is trained to consider all these factors in order to determine the most suitable type of anaesthesia for your particular circumstances. It is important to realize that the surgeon will recommend a particular type of anaesthesia, but it is only after thorough consultation with you, the patient, that a final decision will be made. Your input is thus equally important.

