

Going Home after Spinal Anesthesia

What is spinal anesthesia?

Spinal anesthesia is a type of anesthesia used to provide pain relief during surgery. A small dose of local anesthetic (“freezing”) is injected into the spinal fluid that surrounds your spinal cord in your back.

You will be frozen from your chest to your toes and your legs will feel very heavy. You will be awake unless your anesthesiologist provides some sedation medication to make you drowsy during the surgery.

The frozen feeling can last a few hours after surgery. You will not be able to move or feel your lower body for a few hours until the anesthesia wears off.

What to expect afterward

- DO NOT do any activities which require coordination for the first 24 hours, (i.e. drive a car, bicycle, travel alone by public transportation, operate heavy machinery).
- Before you leave the hospital, the nurse will make sure you are strong enough to stand by yourself. When you are at home, hold onto railings or furniture when moving to make sure you are stable.
- Rest in bed until you feel fully recovered from the anesthetic. For the first day, avoid vigorous physical activities such as jogging or aerobics or heavy lifting.
- Drink plenty of fluids (minimum 4 cups/day) for 2–3 days.

What is a spinal headache?

- Some people get a strong headache 1-5 days after spinal anesthesia called a “spinal headache” (also called “post dural puncture headache”).
- The headache usually gets worse when you sit up or stand, and goes away when you lie down.
- For some people, the headache goes away in a couple days. Simple treatments (see below) can help with these headaches.

If you get a spinal headache:

- Increase your oral fluid intake.
- Rest and lay flat instead of sitting up. Lying flat is usually more comfortable.
- Avoid bright lights and noise.
- Take Tylenol (Acetaminophen) and Advil (Ibuprofen) – follow the instructions on the label.
- Drink 2 cups of coffee or tea. Caffeine sometimes helps reduce the headache.

If the headache does not go away after trying these, you may need a treatment called an “epidural blood patch”. Call an anesthesiologist at BC Women’s:

- Mon to Fri (7:30am-3:30pm): 604-875-2158
- All other times: 604-875-2424



**Contact your primary care
provider or go to
Emergency if you:**

- Have a fever or chills.
- Have a headache AND confusion, drowsiness or vomiting
- Have signs of infection on your lower back, like:
 - Redness
 - Swelling
 - Pus-like drainage
 - Tenderness