

# FASTING GUIDELINES BEFORE SURGERY

## Patient Education

**What does "fasting" mean?** — "Fasting" means not eating or drinking anything for a period of time. People often need to fast before getting a medical test, procedure or surgery.

You **will** need to fast if you are getting any of the following:

- **General anesthesia** – This type of anesthesia makes you unconscious so you can't feel, see, or hear anything during surgery. Some of the medicines are given through a thin tube that goes into a vein, called an "IV." Others are gases that you breathe in.
- **Regional anesthesia** – This type of anesthesia blocks pain in one area of your body, such as an arm, leg, or the lower half of your body. The doctor will inject medicine around the nerves that go to the area where you are getting surgery.
- **Sedation** – This is the term for getting medicines to make you relax and feel sleepy.

**Why do I need to fast?** — If you have food or liquid in your stomach, some of it could get into your lungs while you are under anesthesia. Normally, your body is able to prevent what's in your stomach from entering your lungs. But anesthesia medicines make it harder for your body to prevent this.

When food or liquids from the stomach get into the lungs, doctors call it "aspiration." This is rare, but can be dangerous if it does happen. That's because it can lead to infection, lung damage, or breathing problems.

**How long before my surgery do I have to stop eating and drinking?** — it's important to follow your doctor or nurse's instructions carefully, but, in general:

- DO NOT eat any **solid foods** after midnight before your surgery. You should also avoid milk and cream after this time, even small amounts like in coffee or tea. That's because milk "curdles" into small solid bits in the stomach.
- YOU CAN drink **clear liquids** up to 3 hours before your surgery (up to 16 oz.). Clear liquids include water, clear juice (like apple or cranberry), coffee or tea **without** milk or cream and sports drinks (Gatorade). Clear drinks with carbohydrates are preferred (clear juice, sports drinks). **No protein** drinks/shakes.
- **DO NOT** eat or drink **anything**, even clear liquids, during the 3 hours before your surgery.

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There are also special rules for babies and young children who need surgery. You may give *breast milk* up to *4 hours* before surgery. If your baby drinks formula, you should stop 6 hours before surgery, and **all solid foods should stop at midnight before surgery**. Your child's doctor or nurse can tell you exactly what to do.

**Should I keep taking my medicines before surgery?** — It depends. Your doctor or nurse will tell you which medicines you should take and when. Some medicines need to be stopped before surgery. But for others, it's important that you keep taking them as usual. You might also get new medicines to take before surgery.

Take the medicines your doctor or nurse tells you to. If you need to take medicine right before your surgery, you can take it with a sip of water. You may be asked to take some medications before surgery as part of advanced pain management protocols.

**What will happen if I don't fast?** — If you don't follow instructions about when to stop eating and drinking, you could be putting your health at risk and it could be dangerous. Be honest with your doctor or nurse if you did not follow the rules, even if it was an accident. If this happens, your surgery might need to be delayed until a later time.