

Sedation for Endoscopy

The vast majority of Australian patients prefer to have endoscopies performed under sedation although it is possible to complete both gastroscopy and colonoscopy without any sedation. Gastroscopy does however provoke powerful and unpleasant gag reflexes in many patients and colonoscopy can commonly cause significant pain.

We recommend that our patients receive our standard sedation, although we are prepared to perform endoscopy with minimal or no sedation for patients who prefer that option.

In our endoscopy centres a dedicated team of doctors, who participate in an ongoing training program to ensure that the procedures used are standardised and that emergency resuscitation techniques are familiar, deliver the sedation. There is a Director of Anaesthesia who is a specialist anaesthetist (Dr Ramesh Patel) who coordinates this service. There is one other specialist anaesthetist while all the other doctors giving sedation are General Practitioner sedationists who have undertaken training in this field. All are trained in the field and have considerable experience in providing sedation for endoscopy.

The endoscopist and/or anaesthetist or sedationist assesses all patients undergoing procedures and have their vital signs checked prior to the procedure. All patients have automated monitoring of pulse, blood pressure and oxygen saturation and receive supplemental oxygen during the procedure. Nearly all endoscopy patients are given a combination of midazolam (Hynovel), fentanyl (Sublimaze) and propofol (Dipravan) intravenously as the sedating agents. We have found that this gives excellent sedation, with nearly all patients having minimal recall of the procedure and recovering quickly without any nausea or prolonged drowsiness. The doses of the drugs can be easily adjusted to ensure every patient is completely comfortable during the procedure. After the procedure the patients are moved to the recovery area where they continue to be monitored by our experienced nursing staff until fully awake. Patients are usually ready to be discharged from the centre about one hour after the endoscopy has been completed. No patient who has received any sedative drug should drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery till the day after the procedure.

The safety of this technique has been confirmed by a recent review of 28,000 procedures performed in our endoscopy centres over a five-year period. The staff in the endoscopy or recovery areas successfully managed the few problems that were encountered.