What is sedation?

Sedation is defined as minimal depressed level of consciousness and it does not prevent the patient from maintaining basic reflexes such as breathing, coughing, or some types of movement. Sedation is administered during certain procedures to prevent or lessen the discomfort caused by such procedures. Sedation is not general anesthesia; instead, it causes reduction in the reflexes and impaired perception of the environment. However, the response to medications varies for each patient, and safety measures are taken in order to reduce the risks during the procedure.

How is sedation administered?

Sedation is performed by means of puncture of a vein through which medications are administered. These medications decrease the pain threshold and cause drowsiness. For greater safety during sedation, oxygen is administered and the patient is monitored throughout the procedure to check whether blood oxygenation, blood pressure, and heart rate are normal. Depending on the degree of sedation, it can be administered by the physician responsible for the procedure or test, by another physician, or by an anesthesiologist.

Does the doctor evaluate the patient prior to sedation?

The doctor responsible for administering the sedation will evaluate the patient before the test to analyze preexisting conditions, family history, fasting time, allergies, and current medications (including sleep medications, tranquilizers, and antidepressants). The drugs used for sedation typically cause no allergic reactions, but it is very important to report any history of problems with sedatives and/or anesthetic drugs in advance.

Are there any risks related to sedation?

Currently, the risks and complications related to sedation are rare because of the concern with hospital safety and quality standards. Certainly, there are factors related to sedation for the procedure/test that is being performed and to the patient's clinical conditions that make it impossible to reach a zero risk rate. In some cases (patients with a severe illness, debilitated patients, children, some elderly patients, and patients who have experienced problems with sedation/anesthesia or those with resistance to anesthetic drugs), it may be necessary to use anesthesia monitored by an anesthesiologist instead of sedation.

And what happens after sedation?

After the procedure or test, the patient remains under observation until achieving a normal level of consciousness and being able to eat and walk without assistance. As the drugs used for sedation are not immediately eliminated from the patient's body, the presence of an adult companion responsible for monitoring the patient after leaving the hospital is mandatory. In addition, patients should not work, drive, and perform activities that require concentration on the day of the test.