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RESEARCH ARTICLE
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ANESTHESIA MANAGEMENT IN DERMATOLOGICAL SURGERY: TECHNIQUES, CHALLENGES, AND COMPLICATIONS

Dr. Y. Venkata Subbaiah[1], Dr Ahsan Mustafa[2]

[1]Associate Professor, Department of DVL, Dr. V.R.K. Womens' Medical College, Aziz Nagar R.R. District 500057, Telangana. Email: dryvs1978@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Dermatological surgery has transitioned significantly from hospital operating theaters to office-based settings and ambulatory surgical centers. This shift requires anesthesia providers and dermatologic surgeons to possess a nuanced understanding of specialized anesthetic techniques tailored to diverse procedures, ranging from micrographic skin cancer excisions to extensive body-contouring liposuctions.

Objective: This comprehensive review synthesizes current anesthetic modalities utilized in dermatological surgery, evaluates procedural and patient-specific challenges, analyzes potential localized and systemic complications, and establishes evidence-based mitigation protocols.

Methods: A systematic review of contemporary literature regarding local anesthesia, regional nerve blocks, tumescent local anesthesia (TLA), and intravenous conscious sedation in dermatological subspecialties was performed. Extracted parameters focused on safety thresholds, drug toxicity dynamics, patient comorbidities, and adverse event management.

Results: Local and regional techniques remain the foundation of dermatological anesthesia, offering excellent targeted pain control with minimal systemic impact. Tumescent local anesthesia allows large-scale interventions (e.g., liposuction) without general anesthesia, though it introduces a risk of delayed lidocaine toxicity due to slow systemic absorption. Intravenous sedation options, such as dexmedetomidine, propofol, and midazolam, enhance patient compliance during long or high-anxiety procedures but necessitate strict airway monitoring. Key challenges include operating on elderly patients with extensive cardiovascular or pulmonary comorbidities and navigating complex facial anatomy. Primary complications range from benign vasovagal episodes to severe Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity (LAST) and epinephrine-induced hypertensive crises.

Conclusion: Anesthesia management in dermatological surgery demands a precise, patient-centric approach that balances surgical access with patient safety. By implementing strict weight-based dosing, keeping lipid emulsion rescue therapies readily available, and utilizing proper patient positioning, clinicians can effectively minimize risks and optimize outcomes in ambulatory and office-based settings.

Keywords: Dermatological surgery; Local anesthesia; Tumescent local anesthesia (TLA); Regional nerve block; Office-based surgery; Ambulatory surgery; Conscious sedation; Intravenous sedation; Dexmedetomidine; Propofol; Midazolam; Local anesthetic systemic toxicity (LAST); Lidocaine

toxicity; Patient safety; Perioperative anesthesia; Liposuction; Mohs micrographic surgery; Pain management; Airway management; Dermatologic anesthesia.

1. Introduction

Dermatological surgery has evolved remarkably over the past few decades, driven by advances in surgical techniques, anesthetic agents, and minimally invasive technologies. Modern dermatologic procedures encompass a broad spectrum of diagnostic, therapeutic, reconstructive, and cosmetic interventions that are performed on the skin, subcutaneous tissue, adnexal structures, and superficial soft tissues. These procedures range from relatively simple excisional biopsies and benign lesion removal to highly specialized interventions such as Mohs micrographic surgery (MMS), wide local excision of melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers, scar revision, skin grafting, flap reconstruction, hair transplantation, laser resurfacing, dermabrasion, chemical peeling, thread lifting, and large-volume tumescent liposuction. Owing to the superficial nature of these procedures and continuous improvements in local anesthetic techniques, the majority of dermatological surgeries can now be safely performed in outpatient clinics, ambulatory surgical centers, and office-based operating suites rather than conventional hospital operating rooms.

The migration of dermatologic surgery from hospital settings to office-based practice has transformed the delivery of dermatologic care. Office-based surgery offers numerous advantages, including shorter waiting times, reduced healthcare expenditure, decreased hospitalization rates, improved resource utilization, and enhanced patient convenience. Patients benefit from familiar clinical environments, shorter recovery periods, same-day discharge, and faster return to routine activities. From a healthcare perspective, office-based procedures reduce operating room occupancy, lower institutional costs, and improve accessibility to dermatological services. Consequently, ambulatory dermatologic surgery has become the preferred model for many reconstructive and aesthetic procedures worldwide.

Despite these advantages, office-based dermatological surgery presents unique anesthetic challenges that require meticulous planning and individualized patient care. Unlike hospital operating theaters, outpatient clinics generally possess limited resources for advanced airway management, invasive cardiovascular monitoring, and emergency critical care. Therefore, anesthetic techniques employed in dermatologic surgery must provide effective analgesia, anxiolysis, and patient comfort while maintaining spontaneous ventilation, cardiovascular stability, and rapid postoperative recovery. These objectives become particularly important because patients are expected to return home within a few hours after surgery, necessitating anesthetic approaches with minimal residual sedation and low complication rates.

The patient population undergoing dermatological surgery is remarkably heterogeneous, further complicating anesthetic management. Cosmetic dermatology frequently involves young, healthy individuals seeking elective aesthetic enhancement, whereas reconstructive dermatologic surgery commonly treats elderly patients with multiple systemic comorbidities, including hypertension, diabetes mellitus, coronary artery disease, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and anticoagulant therapy. Aging populations also exhibit reduced physiological reserve, altered pharmacokinetics, impaired hepatic and renal drug clearance, and increased sensitivity to anesthetic agents. Consequently, anesthetic planning must consider individual patient characteristics, medical history, concurrent medications, allergies, and overall functional status to maximize safety and minimize perioperative risk.

Another important consideration in dermatological anesthesia is the anatomical location of many procedures. Facial surgeries—including Mohs micrographic surgery, eyelid reconstruction, rhinoplasty revisions, scar correction, laser resurfacing, thread lifting, and cosmetic filler complication management—are performed in close proximity to the upper airway. During these procedures, surgical drapes frequently cover the patient's nose and mouth, limiting direct visualization of respiratory effort and complicating airway access should an emergency arise. Simultaneously, surgeons require unobstructed access to delicate facial structures where even minimal patient movement may compromise surgical precision or aesthetic outcomes. Therefore, anesthetic depth must be carefully balanced to provide adequate anxiolysis and analgesia while preserving spontaneous respiration, airway reflexes, and patient cooperation whenever necessary.

Effective anesthesia in dermatological surgery also requires an understanding of procedure-specific pain characteristics. While many cutaneous procedures are adequately managed using local infiltration anesthesia alone, more extensive interventions—such as tumescent liposuction, follicular unit extraction (FUE) hair transplantation, laser-assisted resurfacing, extensive flap reconstruction, and prolonged Mohs surgery—may involve several hours of operative time, repeated injections, tissue manipulation, and considerable patient anxiety. Under these circumstances, adjunctive techniques including regional nerve blocks, tumescent local anesthesia (TLA), intravenous conscious sedation, and multimodal analgesia significantly improve procedural tolerance and patient satisfaction.

Among available anesthetic modalities, local anesthesia remains the cornerstone of dermatologic surgery because it provides highly targeted analgesia while minimizing systemic drug exposure. Regional nerve blocks extend anesthesia over larger anatomical territories and reduce the total dose of local anesthetic required. Tumescent local anesthesia has revolutionized procedures such as liposuction by permitting large-volume fat removal without the need for general anesthesia, while simultaneously reducing intraoperative blood loss through vasoconstriction produced by dilute epinephrine solutions. Intravenous sedative agents—including midazolam, propofol, and dexmedetomidine—serve as valuable adjuncts for lengthy or anxiety-provoking procedures, although their administration necessitates continuous physiological monitoring and preparedness for airway intervention.

Despite the overall safety profile of dermatological anesthesia, complications may occur if meticulous technique and appropriate patient monitoring are not maintained. Minor adverse events such as vasovagal syncope, injection-site pain, anxiety reactions, and transient tachycardia are relatively common and usually self-limiting. More serious complications include inadvertent intravascular injection, allergic reactions, methemoglobinemia, epinephrine-induced hypertensive crises, postoperative hematoma, and Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity (LAST), a potentially life-threatening condition characterized by neurological excitation followed by cardiovascular collapse. Early recognition, strict adherence to weight-based dosing recommendations, aspiration before injection, incremental administration of local anesthetics, and immediate availability of 20% lipid emulsion therapy have substantially improved the management and outcomes of these rare but critical events.

Furthermore, advances in ultrasound-guided regional anesthesia, long-acting local anesthetic formulations, multimodal pain management strategies, and standardized sedation protocols continue to improve both patient safety and procedural efficiency. The growing emphasis on enhanced recovery pathways and office-based surgery has further highlighted the importance of individualized anesthetic planning that balances analgesia, patient comfort, rapid recovery, and optimal surgical conditions.

In view of these evolving clinical practices, a comprehensive understanding of dermatological anesthesia has become increasingly important for dermatologic surgeons, anesthesiologists, plastic surgeons, and other healthcare professionals involved in outpatient skin surgery. This review comprehensively examines the principles of anesthesia used in dermatological surgery, including local infiltration anesthesia, regional nerve blocks, tumescent local anesthesia, and intravenous conscious sedation. It further discusses pharmacological considerations, patient selection, procedural challenges, perioperative monitoring, complication prevention, and evidence-based management strategies, with the ultimate objective of optimizing patient safety, improving procedural outcomes, and enhancing the quality of care in modern office-based and ambulatory dermatologic surgery.

2. Anesthetic Techniques in Dermatological Surgery

Anesthesia is the cornerstone of successful dermatological surgery, ensuring adequate pain control, patient comfort, optimal surgical conditions, and procedural safety. The majority of dermatologic procedures are performed in outpatient clinics or office-based settings, where local and regional anesthetic techniques allow patients to remain awake while maintaining excellent analgesia and rapid postoperative recovery. Selection of an appropriate anesthetic technique depends upon multiple factors, including the size and anatomical location of the lesion, expected duration of surgery, procedural complexity, patient anxiety, age, medical comorbidities, anticipated blood loss, and the need for patient cooperation during surgery. The ideal anesthetic technique should provide profound analgesia, preserve normal physiological function, minimize systemic drug exposure, and facilitate early ambulation with minimal postoperative complications.

Modern dermatological anesthesia encompasses four principal modalities: topical anesthesia, local infiltration anesthesia, regional nerve blocks, tumescent local anesthesia (TLA), and intravenous procedural sedation. These techniques may be used individually or in combination depending on procedural requirements. Continuous advances in anesthetic pharmacology, ultrasound-guided regional blocks, buffered local anesthetics, and multimodal sedation have further improved patient safety while expanding the range of procedures that can be performed safely outside the traditional operating room.

2.1 Topical and Local Infiltration Anesthesia

Topical anesthesia represents the least invasive method of achieving cutaneous analgesia and is particularly valuable for superficial dermatologic procedures involving the epidermis and superficial dermis. It is commonly used before laser resurfacing, intense pulsed light (IPL) therapy, dermabrasion, superficial chemical peeling, microneedling, skin biopsies, intralesional injections, vascular lesion treatment, filler injections, and venipuncture. Because topical anesthetics penetrate only intact skin to a limited depth, they are primarily indicated for procedures involving minimal tissue manipulation.

The most widely used topical anesthetic is EMLA cream (Eutectic Mixture of Local Anesthetics), containing 2.5% lidocaine and 2.5% prilocaine. The eutectic formulation lowers the melting point of the anesthetic mixture, allowing efficient dermal penetration. Alternative preparations include LMX-4 (4% liposomal lidocaine), LMX-5 (5% lidocaine), tetracaine gel, and compounded lidocaine-tetracaine formulations. These preparations typically require 30–60 minutes of occlusive application before adequate dermal anesthesia develops. Deeper anesthesia may require prolonged application times of up to 90 minutes depending on skin thickness and anatomical location.

The effectiveness of topical anesthesia depends upon several factors, including:

- Drug concentration
- Duration of occlusion
- Integrity of the epidermal barrier
- Skin thickness
- Body site
- Local blood flow
- Patient age

Although topical anesthesia significantly reduces needle pain and superficial procedural discomfort, it is insufficient for deeper excisions, flap surgery, liposuction, or reconstructive procedures, where infiltration anesthesia becomes necessary.

Local Infiltration Anesthesia

Direct infiltration of local anesthetic into the dermis and subcutaneous tissue remains the most frequently employed anesthetic technique in dermatologic surgery. It provides rapid onset, profound analgesia, minimal systemic exposure, and excellent safety when administered appropriately.

The preferred agents belong to the amide local anesthetic class, including:

- Lidocaine
- Bupivacaine
- Ropivacaine
- Mepivacaine

Among these, lidocaine (0.5–2%) remains the gold standard because of its rapid onset (2–5 minutes), intermediate duration of action, favorable safety profile, and low incidence of allergic reactions.

Addition of epinephrine (1:100,000–1:200,000) substantially improves anesthetic efficacy by producing localized α_1-mediated vasoconstriction. This offers several clinical advantages:

- Prolonged anesthetic duration
- Reduced systemic absorption
- Lower peak plasma lidocaine concentration
- Reduced intraoperative bleeding
- Improved visualization of tissue planes
- Decreased need for repeat injections

In cosmetic facial surgery, even minimal reductions in bleeding substantially improve visualization and surgical precision.

Injection discomfort remains one of the primary causes of patient anxiety during dermatologic procedures. Several methods have been developed to minimize injection pain, including:

- Slow injection technique
- Small-gauge needles (27–30 G)
- Warming the anesthetic solution
- Distraction techniques
- Vibration anesthesia
- Buffering with sodium bicarbonate

Among these, buffering lidocaine with 8.4% sodium bicarbonate in a ratio of 1:9 has become widely accepted. Increasing solution pH reduces tissue irritation, accelerates onset of action, improves patient comfort, and increases the proportion of non-ionized lidocaine capable of crossing neuronal membranes.

2.2 Regional Nerve Blocks

Regional nerve blockade provides complete anesthesia to an entire anatomical region by interrupting nerve conduction proximal to the operative site. Compared with local infiltration, nerve blocks require substantially smaller anesthetic volumes while avoiding tissue distortion, making them particularly valuable in reconstructive and cosmetic surgery where preservation of normal anatomical contours is essential.

Regional blocks offer numerous advantages:

- Excellent anesthesia over large operative fields
- Minimal tissue swelling
- Preservation of surgical landmarks
- Lower total anesthetic dose
- Longer duration of analgesia
- Reduced postoperative pain
- Improved cosmetic accuracy

These characteristics are especially important during facial reconstruction, flap surgery, Mohs micrographic surgery, scar revision, nail surgery, and digital reconstruction.

Facial Nerve Blocks

The face receives sensory innervation primarily from the trigeminal nerve (cranial nerve V), whose three divisions can be selectively anesthetized.

Common facial nerve blocks include:

- Supraorbital nerve block
- Supratrochlear nerve block
- Infraorbital nerve block
- Mental nerve block
- Auriculotemporal nerve block
- Zygomaticofacial nerve block

These techniques provide extensive anesthesia for procedures involving the forehead, eyelids, cheeks, nose, lips, chin, scalp, and temples while preserving natural tissue architecture.

Digital Nerve Blocks

Digital anesthesia is indispensable for procedures involving fingers and toes, including:

- Nail matrixectomy
- Ingrown toenail surgery
- Digital cyst excision
- Glomus tumor removal
- Foreign body extraction
- Soft tissue reconstruction

Traditional techniques include:

- Two-sided dorsal approach
- Single volar injection
- Transthecal digital block
- Wing block for nail surgery

These methods provide rapid, reliable anesthesia without excessive tissue distortion.

Current Perspective on Epinephrine Use

For many decades, clinicians avoided epinephrine in fingers, toes, ears, nose, and penis because of concerns regarding ischemic necrosis. However, extensive modern clinical evidence has demonstrated that low-concentration epinephrine (1:100,000–1:200,000) is safe in healthy individuals with intact peripheral circulation.

Benefits include:

- Superior hemostasis
- Longer anesthesia
- Reduced anesthetic requirements
- Elimination of digital tourniquets
- Improved surgical visualization

Nevertheless, epinephrine should still be used cautiously in patients with:

- Peripheral vascular disease
- Raynaud phenomenon
- Severe diabetes with vascular compromise
- Vasculitis
- Previous frostbite injury

2.3 Tumescent Local Anesthesia (TLA)

The introduction of Tumescent Local Anesthesia (TLA) by Jeffrey Klein revolutionized dermatologic surgery, particularly liposuction. Today, TLA is considered one of the greatest advances in office-based anesthesia because it permits extensive surgical procedures without general anesthesia while maintaining excellent patient safety.

TLA involves infiltration of large volumes of highly diluted anesthetic solution into subcutaneous fat until the tissues become swollen ("tumescent"). This creates uniform anesthesia throughout the operative field while simultaneously reducing bleeding and facilitating tissue dissection.

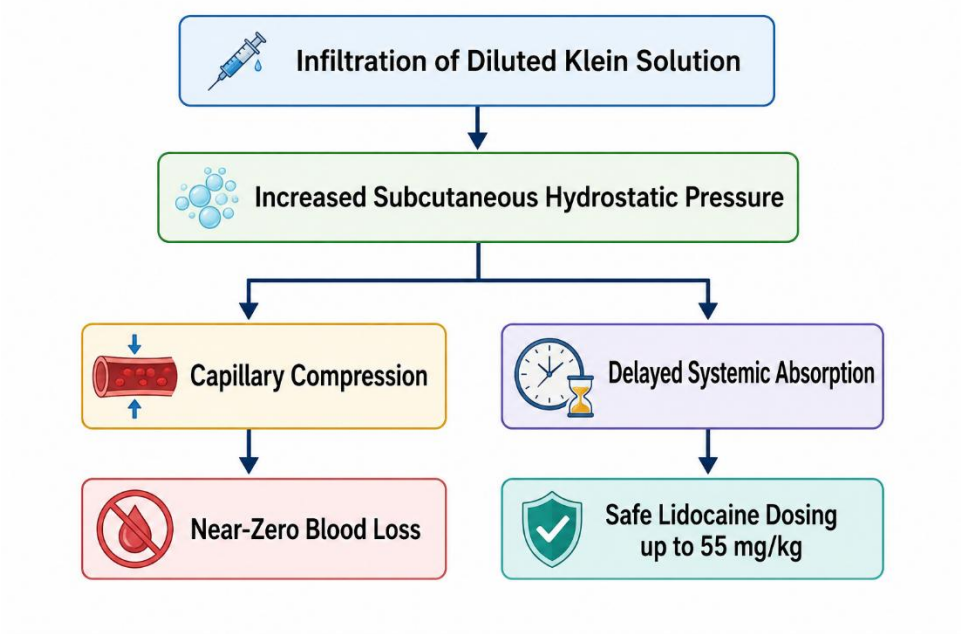

Figure 1

Standard Klein Solution

A typical tumescent solution contains:

- Lidocaine: 0.05–0.10% (500–1000 mg/L)
- Epinephrine: 1:1,000,000 (1 mg/L)
- Sodium bicarbonate: 10 mEq/L
- Normal saline: 1000 mL

The solution is infiltrated slowly using blunt cannulas until uniform tissue expansion is achieved.

Mechanism of Action

TLA produces several simultaneous physiological effects:

- Increased hydrostatic pressure
- Separation of fat compartments
- Compression of capillary vessels
- Marked reduction in bleeding
- Delayed systemic lidocaine absorption
- Uniform anesthetic distribution
- Easier fat aspiration
- Reduced postoperative pain

The compression of microvasculature by hydrostatic pressure combined with epinephrine-induced vasoconstriction results in near-bloodless operative fields, greatly improving surgical visualization.

An important pharmacokinetic advantage of TLA is the delayed systemic absorption of lidocaine. Because adipose tissue has relatively poor vascularity, lidocaine enters the circulation gradually, producing substantially lower peak plasma concentrations than conventional infiltration anesthesia. Consequently, the maximum recommended lidocaine dose increases from approximately 7 mg/kg with epinephrine to 35–55 mg/kg during properly performed tumescent anesthesia, depending on liposuction volume and tissue vascularity.

Despite its excellent safety profile, clinicians must remain vigilant for delayed Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity (LAST) because peak plasma lidocaine concentrations may occur 12–18 hours after infiltration.

2.4 Procedural Sedation Adjuncts

Although most dermatological procedures can be completed under local or regional anesthesia alone, some patients experience significant anxiety, needle phobia, claustrophobia, or discomfort during prolonged operations. Cosmetic procedures lasting several hours—including hair transplantation, extensive laser resurfacing, thread lifting, large flap reconstruction, and liposuction—often require adjunctive intravenous sedation to improve patient comfort while maintaining procedural precision.

The objectives of procedural sedation include:

- Anxiety reduction
- Patient immobility
- Mild analgesia
- Preservation of spontaneous ventilation
- Maintenance of airway reflexes
- Rapid postoperative recovery
- Improved surgeon satisfaction

Commonly used sedative agents include:

Midazolam

Provides:

- Anxiolysis
- Sedation
- Anterograde amnesia

Limitations include respiratory depression and prolonged recovery.

Propofol

Advantages:

- Rapid onset
- Easy titration
- Short recovery

Disadvantages:

- Airway obstruction
- Hypotension
- Respiratory depression
- Requirement for continuous airway monitoring

Dexmedetomidine

Dexmedetomidine has emerged as one of the most valuable sedatives in cosmetic dermatology because of its unique pharmacological profile. As a highly selective α_2-adrenergic agonist, it produces "cooperative sedation," enabling patients to remain calm, responsive, and capable of following commands while maintaining spontaneous respiration and intact protective airway reflexes.

This property is particularly advantageous during facial cosmetic procedures requiring dynamic assessment of facial symmetry, eyelid position, eyebrow movement, or smile dynamics. Unlike propofol or benzodiazepines, dexmedetomidine produces minimal respiratory depression, thereby reducing the need for airway interventions that may interfere with the sterile surgical field. Additionally, its analgesic and sympatholytic properties reduce opioid requirements, attenuate stress-induced cardiovascular responses, and enhance overall patient and surgeon satisfaction.

Collectively, the integration of topical anesthesia, local infiltration, regional nerve blocks, tumescent anesthesia, and carefully titrated procedural sedation provides a comprehensive anesthetic strategy capable of addressing the diverse procedural requirements encountered in modern dermatological surgery. Appropriate selection and combination of these modalities optimize pain control, minimize complications, improve cosmetic precision, and enhance patient safety in both ambulatory and office-based surgical practice.

3. Procedural and Patient-Specific Challenges in Dermatological Anesthesia

The success of dermatological surgery depends not only on selecting an appropriate anesthetic technique but also on recognizing patient-specific risk factors and procedure-related challenges that may influence perioperative safety. Unlike traditional operating room environments, office-based dermatologic procedures are often performed under local anesthesia or conscious sedation with limited access to advanced airway equipment and intensive monitoring facilities. Consequently, comprehensive preoperative evaluation, individualized anesthetic planning, vigilant intraoperative monitoring, and prompt recognition of complications are essential for optimizing patient outcomes.

Several factors complicate anesthetic management in dermatological surgery, including advanced patient age, multiple systemic comorbidities, polypharmacy, prolonged procedural duration, altered drug metabolism, complex facial anatomy, and the unique challenges associated with procedures performed near the upper airway. Cosmetic interventions additionally require absolute patient immobility while maintaining spontaneous ventilation and preserving natural facial movement for intraoperative assessment. These competing requirements necessitate a balanced anesthetic strategy that maximizes patient comfort without compromising respiratory or cardiovascular stability.

3.1 The Geriatric Patient and Medical Comorbidities

The incidence of non-melanoma skin cancer, melanoma, and other cutaneous malignancies increases substantially with advancing age. Consequently, Mohs micrographic surgery, wide local excisions, flap reconstruction, and skin grafting are predominantly performed in elderly individuals, many of whom present with multiple chronic medical conditions. Advanced age itself produces significant physiological alterations affecting anesthetic pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, cardiovascular reserve, pulmonary function, hepatic metabolism, and renal clearance. These changes increase susceptibility to adverse drug reactions and require careful dose adjustment of local anesthetics and sedative agents.

Age-Related Physiological Changes

Several physiological changes occurring with aging influence anesthetic management:

- Reduced cardiac output
- Decreased hepatic blood flow
- Declining renal function
- Reduced plasma protein binding
- Increased body fat percentage
- Decreased lean body mass
- Reduced pulmonary compliance
- Impaired baroreceptor responsiveness

Collectively, these alterations prolong the elimination half-life of many anesthetic drugs, increase plasma drug concentrations, and enhance sensitivity to sedatives and opioids. Therefore, elderly patients often require lower initial doses and slower titration of both local anesthetics and intravenous sedatives.

Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disorders are among the most common comorbidities encountered in dermatologic surgery. Patients frequently present with:

- Hypertension
- Coronary artery disease
- Congestive heart failure
- Cardiac arrhythmias
- Previous myocardial infarction
- Valvular heart disease
- Implanted pacemakers or defibrillators

These conditions increase the risk of perioperative hypotension, arrhythmias, myocardial ischemia, and adverse responses to epinephrine-containing anesthetic solutions.

Special precautions include:

- Careful blood pressure monitoring

- Limiting total epinephrine dose
- Slow administration of local anesthetics
- Avoiding intravascular injection
- Continuous ECG monitoring during prolonged procedures

Patients with unstable angina, recent myocardial infarction, or uncontrolled hypertension may require postponement of elective cosmetic surgery until cardiovascular status has been optimized.

Respiratory Disease

Patients with chronic respiratory disorders require additional attention because sedative medications may reduce ventilatory reserve.

Common respiratory comorbidities include:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Asthma
- Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)
- Interstitial lung disease
- Pulmonary hypertension

In patients receiving procedural sedation, supplemental oxygen, pulse oximetry, respiratory rate monitoring, and careful titration of sedative agents become particularly important. Dexmedetomidine may offer advantages in such patients because of its minimal respiratory depressant effects compared with propofol or opioid-based sedation.

Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetic patients frequently undergo dermatologic surgery for chronic wounds, skin cancers, and reconstructive procedures.

Potential perioperative concerns include:

- Delayed wound healing
- Increased infection risk
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Renal impairment
- Cardiovascular disease

Blood glucose should be optimized preoperatively, and prolonged fasting should be avoided whenever possible.

Polypharmacy

One of the greatest challenges in elderly dermatologic patients is polypharmacy, which significantly increases the likelihood of drug-drug interactions and adverse anesthetic events.

Frequently encountered medications include:

- Antihypertensives
- Anticoagulants
- Antiplatelet drugs
- Oral hypoglycemic agents
- Insulin
- Beta-blockers
- Calcium channel blockers

- Corticosteroids
- Antidepressants
- Antiepileptic drugs

Medication reconciliation before surgery is therefore an essential component of preoperative assessment.

Anticoagulant and Antiplatelet Therapy

Management of anticoagulation remains one of the most debated aspects of dermatologic surgery.

Patients commonly receive:

- Warfarin
- Aspirin
- Clopidogrel
- Dabigatran
- Rivaroxaban
- Apixaban
- Edoxaban

Historically, these medications were discontinued before surgery because of concerns regarding postoperative bleeding. However, contemporary evidence indicates that interruption of medically necessary anticoagulant or antiplatelet therapy significantly increases the risk of thromboembolic complications, including stroke, pulmonary embolism, myocardial infarction, and prosthetic valve thrombosis.

Current dermatologic surgery guidelines therefore recommend continuing most anticoagulant therapies during routine cutaneous surgery while minimizing bleeding through meticulous surgical technique.

Recommended strategies include:

- Careful electrocautery
- Layered wound closure
- Pressure dressings
- Topical hemostatic agents
- Compression bandages
- Adequate postoperative observation

Minor postoperative hematomas are generally easier to manage than potentially catastrophic thromboembolic events resulting from unnecessary interruption of anticoagulant therapy.

Hepatic Dysfunction

Amide local anesthetics—including lidocaine, bupivacaine, mepivacaine, and ropivacaine—are primarily metabolized by hepatic microsomal enzymes, particularly CYP3A4 and CYP1A2.

Patients with:

- Cirrhosis
- Chronic hepatitis
- Hepatic fibrosis
- Alcoholic liver disease
- Congestive hepatopathy

may demonstrate reduced hepatic clearance, prolonged drug half-life, and increased susceptibility to systemic toxicity.

During lengthy procedures such as Mohs micrographic surgery or extensive reconstructive operations requiring repeated local anesthetic administration, cumulative lidocaine exposure should be carefully monitored.

Dose reduction and longer intervals between injections may be appropriate in patients with significant hepatic impairment.

Renal Dysfunction

Although local anesthetics are metabolized primarily by the liver, their metabolites are excreted through the kidneys.

Patients with chronic kidney disease may experience:

- Reduced metabolite elimination
- Electrolyte abnormalities
- Fluid overload
- Increased cardiovascular instability

Careful fluid management and conservative dosing of sedative medications are therefore recommended.

3.2 Facial Anatomy and Shared Airway Dynamics

Facial dermatologic surgery presents unique anesthetic challenges because the surgical field lies immediately adjacent to the upper airway. Procedures involving the nose, lips, cheeks, forehead, eyelids, scalp, and perioral region require careful coordination between the surgeon and anesthesia provider to maintain both adequate surgical exposure and patient safety.

Unlike surgeries performed on the extremities or trunk, facial procedures frequently require extensive sterile draping that covers the patient's nose and mouth. Consequently, access to the airway becomes limited should respiratory compromise occur during procedural sedation.

Airway Accessibility

Restricted airway access presents several challenges:

- Difficult mask ventilation
- Limited visualization of respiratory effort
- Delayed airway intervention
- Increased aspiration risk
- Limited access for airway devices

These issues become particularly important when moderate or deep sedation is employed.

Therefore, maintenance of spontaneous ventilation and preservation of airway reflexes should remain primary objectives during facial dermatologic procedures.

Carbon Dioxide Retention

Heavy surgical drapes may trap exhaled carbon dioxide around the patient's face, producing gradual carbon dioxide rebreathing.

Clinical consequences include:

- Hypercapnia
- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Tachycardia
- Hypertension
- Patient movement

Importantly, hypercapnia-induced agitation may be incorrectly interpreted as inadequate anesthesia, leading to unnecessary administration of additional sedative medication and increasing the risk of respiratory depression.

Strategies to minimize carbon dioxide accumulation include:

- Split-drape techniques
- Open facial draping
- Low-flow supplemental oxygen
- Adequate room ventilation
- Continuous verbal communication

Patient Movement

Even minimal patient movement during facial surgery may compromise surgical precision.

Movement may result in:

- Irregular incision lines
- Asymmetric reconstruction
- Flap injury
- Laser misapplication
- Vascular injury
- Poor cosmetic outcome

Anesthetic management should therefore provide sufficient anxiolysis while maintaining patient cooperation and spontaneous breathing.

Dexmedetomidine is particularly advantageous because patients remain calm yet responsive to verbal commands.

Communication Between Surgeon and Anesthesia Provider

Successful dermatologic anesthesia depends upon continuous communication between the operating surgeon and anesthesia provider.

Important aspects include:

- Sedation depth
- Patient positioning
- Pain assessment
- Hemodynamic stability
- Airway status
- Procedure duration
- Additional local anesthetic requirements

Early recognition of discomfort or respiratory compromise allows prompt intervention before complications develop.

Patient Positioning

Many dermatologic procedures require prolonged supine or semi-recumbent positioning.

Improper positioning may lead to:

- Neck discomfort
- Back pain
- Peripheral nerve compression
- Pressure injuries

- □Venous congestion
- □Respiratory compromise

Appropriate head support, limb padding, periodic repositioning during lengthy procedures, and optimization of cervical alignment significantly improve patient comfort while reducing positioning-related complications.

Psychological Factors

Anxiety remains one of the most underestimated challenges during office-based dermatologic surgery. Needle phobia, fear of cancer diagnosis, cosmetic concerns, claustrophobia under surgical drapes, and prolonged operative duration may all contribute to sympathetic activation, increased pain perception, and reduced procedural tolerance.

Comprehensive patient counseling, effective communication, reassurance, distraction techniques, and judicious use of anxiolytic medications are therefore integral components of successful anesthetic management.

Overall, effective anesthesia in dermatological surgery extends beyond simple pain control. It requires individualized assessment of patient comorbidities, meticulous planning, understanding of procedure-specific anatomical challenges, and coordinated multidisciplinary care. By recognizing these procedural and patient-specific factors, clinicians can significantly reduce perioperative complications, enhance patient comfort, and improve both functional and cosmetic surgical outcomes in ambulatory dermatologic practice.

4. Complications and Management Strategies

Anesthetic complications in dermatology are broadly categorized into localized tissue reactions and systemic medical emergencies.

4.1. Local Complications

- Hematoma Formation: Driven by inadequate intraoperative hemostasis or the rebound vasodilation that occurs as epinephrine wears off. Large hematomas can compromise skin flap viability and require prompt evacuation.
- Skin Necrosis: Excessive volumes of epinephrine-containing local anesthetics can over-compress microvascular structures in areas with limited collateral circulation (such as the nasal tip or helix of the ear), resulting in ischemic necrosis.

4.2. Systemic Complications

Vasovagal Syncope

The most frequent adverse event in office-based settings, typically triggered by needle phobia, pain, or prolonged upright positioning. It presents as bradycardia, hypotension, pallor, and diaphoresis. Management involves placing the patient in the Trendelenburg position, administering intravenous fluids, and, if bradycardia persists, giving atropine (0.4 to 0.6 mg IV).

Epinephrine Toxicity ("Epinephrine Surge")

Accidental intravascular injection or rapid absorption of epinephrine can trigger transient tachycardia, severe hypertension, anxiety, and tremors. In vulnerable patients with pre-existing coronary artery disease, this surge can precipitate myocardial ischemia or tachyarrhythmias. Treatment centers on

stopping the injection, providing reassurance, administering supplemental oxygen, and utilizing short-acting β-blockers (e.g., esmolol) if hemodynamic parameters remain critically elevated.

Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity (LAST)

LAST occurs when plasma levels of local anesthetics rise above safe thresholds, usually due to inadvertent intravascular delivery or exceeding maximum weight-based dosing.

Phase	Clinical Presentation / Symptoms
Early Central Nervous System (CNS)	Metallic taste, perioral numbness, tinnitus, slurred speech, visual disturbances, and muscle twitching.
Advanced CNS	Generalized tonic-clonic seizures, progressive CNS depression, and coma.
Cardiovascular System (CVS)	Prolonged PR/QRS intervals, bradyarrhythmias, ventricular fibrillation, and eventual cardiovascular collapse.

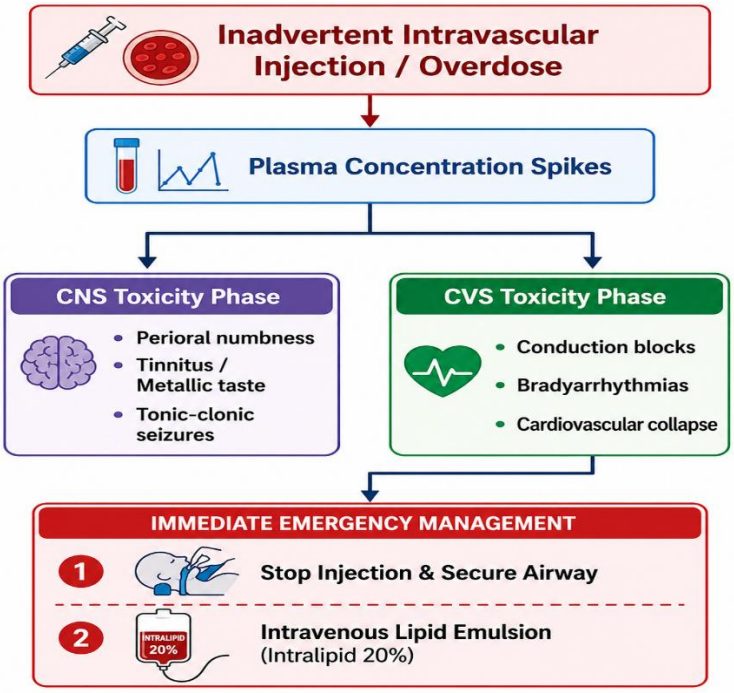

Figure 2

Emergency Protocol for LAST: Immediate management requires stopping the injection, securing the airway with 100% oxygen, and administering Intralipid 20% (Lipid Emulsion Therapy). The protocol involves a 1.5 mL/kg IV bolus over 1 minute, followed by a continuous infusion of 0.25 mL/kg/min to create a "lipid sink" that extracts the lipophilic anesthetic from myocardial and cerebral tissues.

5. Comparative Summary of Anesthetic Modalities

The following framework summarizes the clinical applications, benefits, and major risks of different dermatological anesthesia options:

Anesthetic Modality	**Optimal Indications**	**Primary Advantages**	**Major Risks / Monitoring**
Topical Creams (EMLA)	Superficial lasers, chemical peels, needle biopsies	Needle-free; high patient acceptance	Methemoglobinemia (rare prilocaine effect); contact dermatitis
Buffered Lidocaine Infiltration	Mohs surgery, small cyst excisions, punch biopsies	Rapid onset; minimal pain upon injection	Accidental intravascular injection; tissue distortion
Regional Face Blocks	Lip, nose, and eyelid reconstructions	Preserves surgical margins; wide coverage with low volume	Nerve injury; incomplete block coverage
Tumescent Local Anesthesia	Liposuction, large flap closures, vein ablations	Negligible blood loss; extended postoperative analgesia	Delayed lidocaine toxicity (8–12 hours post-op); fluid overload

6. Conclusion

Anesthesia management in dermatological surgery requires balances tailored to both the ambulatory setting and individual patient needs. While local and regional methods provide efficient, reliable pain control, the expansion of office-based surgeries highlights the importance of rigorous monitoring and safety compliance. By adhering to precise dosing calculations, utilizing buffered solutions, and maintaining standard emergency protocols like lipid emulsion therapy, dermatologic surgeons and anesthesia providers can minimize complications and ensure a high standard of patient safety.

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