



## Department of anaesthesia and critical care

# You and your anaesthetic information for patients

This leaflet gives basic information to help you prepare for your general anaesthetic. Anaesthesia is essential for some operations. You are unconscious and feel nothing. During your operation an anaesthetist who is a doctor with special training will care for you.

### Before coming to the hospital

**Here are some things that you can do to prepare yourself for the operation:**

- If you smoke, giving up for several weeks before the operation reduces the risk of breathing problems.
- If you are very overweight, reducing your weight will reduce many of the risks.
- If you have long-standing medical problems such as diabetes, asthma, thyroid problems, epilepsy or high blood pressure (hypertension), your GP should give you a check up.

### Before your anaesthetic

Some patients will attend a pre-operative assessment clinic. The nurse or doctor will ask you some questions to check your health before your operation such as your fitness and whether you have had any problems with general anaesthetics in the past. It is important for you to bring a list of:

- all the pills, medicines, herbal remedies or supplements you are taking, both prescribed and those that you have purchased over the counter
- any allergies that you may have.

### On the day of your operation

- Please arrange for a friend or relative to drive you home after having your anaesthetic.
- You will have nothing to eat or drink – fasting (“nil by mouth”).
- If you are taking medicines, you should continue to take them as usual, unless your anaesthetist or surgeon has asked you not to.
- If you feel unwell when you are due to come into hospital, please telephone the ward for advice.
- You may have a premedication (a “premed”) which is the name for medicines sometimes given before an anaesthetic.
- You will need a responsible adult to stay with you overnight.

## **When you are called for your operation**

- A member of staff will go with you into the theatre.
- You can wear your glasses, hearing aids and dentures until you are in the anaesthetic room.
- Please remove any jewellery and decorative piercings. If you cannot remove your jewellery, it can be covered with tape to prevent damage to your skin.
- Most people go to theatre on a bed or a trolley.
- Theatre staff will check your identification bracelet, your name and date of birth, and will ask you about other details in your medical records as a final check.

## **The operating theatre**

Most anaesthetics are started in the anaesthetic room. The anaesthetist will attach machines which measure your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels. When the anaesthetic has started and you are asleep, you will go through to the operating theatre for your operation.

Patients going to the radiotherapy theatre are given the anaesthetic in the operating theatre.

## **General anaesthetic**

Anaesthetic medicines may be injected into a vein through a cannula (this is generally used for adults). A cannula is a thin plastic tube put into a vein in the back of your hand.

Once you are asleep, an anaesthetist stays with you at all times and continues to give you medicines to keep you anaesthetised.

After the operation, you will be taken to the recovery room. Recovery staff will be with you at all times. When they are satisfied that you have recovered safely from your anaesthetic, staff will take you back to the ward or the critical care unit.

## **What will I feel like afterwards?**

How you feel will depend on the type of anaesthetic and operation you have had, how much pain relieving medicine you need and your general health. Good pain relief is important and the nurse or doctor will discuss this with you before your operation.

## **Incidence of side effects**

In modern anaesthesia serious problems are uncommon. Deaths caused by anaesthesia are very rare. There are probably about five deaths for every million anaesthetics in the UK.

Very common (1 in 10) and common (1 in 100) side effects

- feeling sick and vomiting after surgery
- sore throat
- dizziness, blurred vision
- headache
- itching
- aches, pains, shivering and backache
- pain during injection of medicines
- bruising and soreness
- confusion or memory loss.

Uncommon side effects (1 in 1000)

- chest infection
- bladder problems
- muscle pains
- slow breathing (depressed respiration)
- damage to teeth, lips or tongue
- an existing medical condition getting worse
- awareness (becoming conscious during your operation).

Rare (1 in 10,000) or very rare (1 in 100,000)

- damage to the eyes
- serious allergy to drugs
- nerve damage
- death
- equipment failure.



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