

Information for Patients

Side effects and complications

In modern anaesthesia, serious problems are uncommon. Risk cannot be removed completely, but modern equipment, training and drugs have made it a much safer procedure in recent years.

RA = may occur with a regional anaesthetic.

GA = may occur with a general anaesthetic.

Very common and common side effects:

RA GA Feeling sick and vomiting after surgery

GA Sore throat

RA GA Dizziness, blurred vision

RA GA Headache

RA GA Bladder problems

GA Damage to lips or tongue (usually minor)

RA GA Itching

RA GA Aches, pains and backache

RA GA Pain during injection of drugs

RA GA Bruising and soreness

GA Confusion or memory loss

Uncommon side effects:

GA Chest infection

GA Muscle pains

RA GA Slow breathing (depressed respiration)

GA Damage to teeth

RA GA An existing medical condition is worse

GA Awareness

Rare or very rare complications:

GA Damage to the eyes

RA GA Heart attack or stroke

RA GA Serious allergy to drugs

RA GA Nerve damage

RA GA Death

RA GA Equipment failure

Deaths caused by purely by anaesthesia are very, very rare. There are probably about five deaths for every million anaesthetics given.

You may feel tired or even exhausted after the operation – sometimes for days. This is unlikely to be caused by the anaesthetic. Tiredness may have many causes, including: worry before the operation, not sleeping properly before or after the operation, loss of blood (causing postoperative anaemia), the condition that needed surgery, not eating or drinking normally before and after your operation, the energy used up by the healing process, your general health.

Checklist

- 1) Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood and increases the risk of breathing problems during and after an operation. If you cannot stop smoking completely, cutting down will help.
- 2) If you have loose or broken teeth, or crowns that are not secure, you may want to visit your dentist for treatment. The anaesthetist may need to put a tube in your throat to help you breathe, and if your teeth are not secure, they may be damaged.
- 3) If you have a long-term medical problem such as diabetes, asthma or bronchitis, thyroid problems, heart problems or high blood pressure (hypertension), you should ask your GP if you need a check-up.
- 4) If you are taking any pills, medicines, herbal remedies or supplements, it is important to bring these with you. A written list of everything you are taking, whether they have been prescribed or whether you have bought them over the counter, would be helpful for your anaesthetist. Chronic medications should be taken at their usual times, even on the day of surgery or when 'nil by mouth'. **Exceptions** to this are drugs such as blood thinners, diabetic medication and certain blood pressure treatments. Please contact us for advice if you take any of these medications. Herbal medications should be stopped a week in advance of surgery.
- 5) If you have any allergies, a note of these will also be helpful.
- 6) **Nothing to eat or drink** – Fasting ('Nil by mouth'): No solid food or any milk may be taken for 6 hours before surgery. Clear fluids such as apple juice, black tea/coffee or water can be taken up until 2 hours before surgery. Patients are encouraged to remain hydrated. Children fed with breast milk can feed up until 4 hours

before surgery. Children on formula milk can feed up until 6 hours before surgery

- 7) A 'Pre-med' is the name for drugs which are given before some anaesthetics. They can reduce or relieve anxiety, help prevent sickness after the operation, treat any health problems you may have, or help with pain relief after your operation. If you feel a pre-med would help you, you can ask your anaesthetist about having one.
- 8) If you are unwell before your operation, please inform the doctors or ward sisters.