

A young person with curly hair is lying in a hospital bed, smiling. A healthcare professional in blue scrubs is standing by the bed, looking down at the patient. The bed has blue linens and a white pillow. The background is a clinical setting.

## A young person's guide to having an anaesthetic

### What is an anaesthetic?

This is when your anaesthetist gives you a drug that makes you unconscious so that you don't feel, hear or see anything during a test or operation.

**Anaesthetists: Doctors who have had specialist training in how to give anaesthetics.**

You will meet your anaesthetist before your operation. They will ask about your health, agree a plan with you for your anaesthetic and controlling your pain, and answer your questions.

### Consent

Nothing will happen until you and your parent or guardian understand and agree with what has been planned for you. Your surgeon will have a discussion with you before your operation and answer any questions you may have.

### Getting ready for your anaesthetic

It is important to be as healthy as possible so avoid breathing cigarette smoke for six weeks before your operation. If you are taking any regular medications bring them with you to the hospital.

For your own safety, your anaesthetist needs to know if you are on the contraceptive pill or using any recreational drugs. They also need to know about any allergies you have.

### Fasting

You must not have anything to eat for 6 hours before your operation. But keep drinking water until an hour before your operation to keep you hydrated. It is important to follow these instructions because if there is food or liquid in your stomach during your anaesthetic, it could come up to the back of your throat and then get down into your throat.

## At the hospital

When you arrive at the hospital the nurse looking after you meet you at reception and take you to your room. A set of observations will be carried out. This includes checking your temperature, pulse, oxygen levels, breathing rate and blood pressure. You will also be weighed so we can calculate medication doses. You will be given a name band to wear on your wrist.

You will be asked to remove any jewellery, make-up, nail varnish, decorative piercings and contact lenses. You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. Sometimes it is possible to wear your own pyjamas to theatre depending on what operation you are having.

There is often a wait before theatre are ready for you so bring something to do such as a book, magazine or gadget. There are televisions in the rooms and free WiFi.

## Having the anaesthetic

Your anaesthetist will start your anaesthetic in a theatre, then take you to the operating theatre, then take you to the operating theatre. Your anaesthetist will start your anaesthetic by giving you an injection into a cannula (see below) or by asking you to breathe in a gas that smells a bit like felt-tip pens. The injection is the quickest way, but both make you feel light headed before you become unconscious. Sometimes you can choose which to have.

If you breathe the gas, you will have a cannula put in once you are unconscious. If you want, a parent or a carer will be able to stay with you until you are unconscious. After that, they can wait for you back on the ward.

**Cannula:** A thin, flexible plastic tube that is put into a vein, usually on the back of your hand. A needle is used to put the cannula in, then the needle is removed straight away. You will be offered numbing cream for the back of your hand to reduce the pain of having the cannula. Once the cannula is in place, your medicines can be injected through it without using any more needles. Your cannula is usually left in place after the operation in case you need painkillers or medicines later.

## While you are under anaesthetic

You won't remember anything. Your anaesthetist will stay with you all the time, They will make sure that you are okay and give you enough anaesthetic and painkillers to stop you from becoming conscious during your operation. There will be equipment to monitor your heart and breathing.

## Waking up afterwards

Operations take different lengths of time, but as soon as the operation is finished, the anaesthetist will stop giving you the anaesthetic drugs. This will allow you to wake up about five minutes later. You'll wake up in the recovery room, where a member of the theatre team will be looking after you. How you feel afterwards will depend on the type of operation and anaesthetic you have had. Common side effects include a sore throat, feeling sick and shivering. You can have treatment for all of these problems to help you feel better.

## Treating pain

It is important to treat pain, and some people (and some types of operation) need more painkillers than others. It is easier to treat pain before it gets bad, so you should ask for help if you are in pain.

## Back on the ward

From the recovery room you return to the ward. You may feel very tired at first. If you have any problems, let your nurse know so they can help you.

When you can eat and drink again will depend on the type of operation and painkillers you have had. Usually you can start sipping water straight away. You will stay in hospital until it is safe to let you go home. On average this is 4-6 hours after your operation.

## Make a note of any questions you may want to ask...

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