

A01lite General Anaesthetic

This document will give you information about a general anaesthetic. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is a general anaesthetic?

A general anaesthetic is a combination of drugs that causes deep sleep. It is used for operations or medical procedures as it causes a loss of sensation and makes you unaware of what is happening to you.

How is the anaesthetic given?

Most people are sent to sleep by injecting the drugs through a drip (small tube) into a vein. It takes about 30 seconds to work. For some people, it may be more appropriate to go to sleep by breathing an anaesthetic gas through a face mask. This also takes about 30 seconds to work.

Are there any alternatives to a general anaesthetic?

Other forms of anaesthetic include injections near the area of surgery (local anaesthesia) or injections of local anaesthetic near major nerves or the spinal cord (regional, epidural or spinal anaesthesia). Local anaesthetics will numb the area to be operated on but you will be awake or under sedation for the operation.

Is a general anaesthetic safe?

A general anaesthetic is safe for most people.

Your anaesthetist may need to do some tests before the operation to assess how safe a general anaesthetic is for you. These may include an ECG, blood tests or lung-function tests.

What complications can happen?

1 Minor complications

- Sickness or feeling sick
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle and back pains
- Dental damage

2 Serious complications

- Loss or change of hearing
- Eye injury
- Nerve injury
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Chest infection and other breathing problems
- Allergic reaction

How will my anaesthetist know that I am really asleep?

The anaesthetist continuously monitors the amount of anaesthetic in your body to make sure that it is extremely unlikely you are aware of what is happening

How soon will I recover?

A general anaesthetic can affect your judgement and reactions for the first 24 hours.

If you are fit and maintain a healthy weight, you are more likely to do well after having a general anaesthetic.

Summary

General anaesthesia is usually a safe and effective way for you to have your operation. Most people do not have any problems.

Further information

- NHS smoking helpline on 0800 022 4332 and at www.smokefree.nhs.uk
- www.eatwell.gov.uk – for advice on maintaining a healthy weight
- www.eidoactive.co.uk – for information on how exercise can help you
- www.aboutmyhealth.org – for support and information you can trust
- Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland at www.aagbi.org
- Royal College of Anaesthetists at www.rcoa.ac.uk
- Royal College of Anaesthetists and Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland www.youranaesthetic.info
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (0845 606 46 47 – textphone)

Acknowledgements

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