

Spinal Anaesthetic – Adult Patient Information Leaflet

What is a Spinal Anaesthetic?

A spinal anaesthetic is an injection of local anaesthetic into the fluid around your spinal cord which will cause numbness and weakness of your tummy and legs for several hours. Some sedative drugs may be given to enable you to sleep while your operation takes place.

Your Anaesthetist will meet you to discuss your anaesthetic on the day of your operation and this will include the pros and cons of each type of anaesthetic. Sometimes a spinal anaesthetic is appropriate for you and may be the best option. Your anaesthetist will be happy to answer any questions on the day and if you would like more details about spinal anaesthetics these are available at www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo

Before you arrive in hospital

Stopping smoking reducing weight and exercising will significantly reduce the risk of complications and speed up your recovery following surgery as will before the day of your operation. It is important that longstanding medical conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes are well controlled.

On the day of your operation

You will be given specific instructions about when you can eat and drink which you must follow. You should take all your regular medications unless you have been given specific instructions not to take them.

What actually happens on the day?

You will walk, if able, to the anaesthetic room where we will check your details and the operation you are having one last time. You will be connected to a monitor so that we can observe your heart, blood pressure and pulse during your operation. A cannula (small tube) will be inserted into a vein, this is normally on the back of your hand and used to give you drugs if necessary during you operation.

You will then usually be asked to sit up with your legs hanging over the edge of the trolley, but you may be able to lie on your side if this is more comfortable for you. Your back will be cleaned with a cold solution and then local anaesthetic will be injected into the skin of your back to numb it, this may sting for a few seconds.

The spinal anaesthetic will then be injected. You may feel your bottom and legs go numb and heavy and this may also affect your lower tummy. Your legs maybe heavy and difficult to move for between 2-6 hours, during which time you will need to stay in bed. During this time you may also experience changes in bladder sensation.

You must not drive for at least 24 hours after your anaesthetic and depending on recovery from your operation this may be longer. If you are taking strong pain killing drugs or sleeping tablets this may affect your ability to drive safely which is now a driving offence <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/drug-driving>

Will I be asleep during my operation?

During your operation you may be given medication to make you feel more relaxed

and make you sleepy but not unconscious. This is not a general anaesthetic and you may be able to hear talking and other noise during your operation. A screen will usually be placed between you and the surgery so you won't see anything. If you wish to watch your operation on a screen this is sometimes possible, just ask. Sometimes you may have a general anaesthetic as well as a spinal anaesthetic and in this case you will not be able to hear or see anything during your operation.

What are the side effects and risks?

Everything a doctor does is a balance between improving your health and minimising the side effects or risks that all treatments have. Your anaesthetist will tell you more about this before your operation and answer any questions you have.

Common (and lasting a short period)

- Low blood pressure.
- Itching.
- Difficulty passing water.
- Pain during injection.
- Headache.

If you have a headache after your spinal, drink plenty of water and take simple pain killers. If you still have a headache prior to discharge please ensure you inform the nursing staff as there are things we can do to help. However, if you have already gone home and you have a headache which does not get better with pain killers please phone the anaesthetic department on 01603 287677 between 9am – 5pm. Outside these hours please phone the contact number you were given on discharge.

Rare complications

- Permanent Nerve damage occurs in between 1 in 23,000 and 1 in 54,000 patients.
- Death or paraplegia occurs in between 1 in 50,000 to 1 in 140,000 patients.

For more information: www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo

For help giving up smoking: Smokefree Norfolk 0800 0854 113



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