

What is a General Anaesthetic?

This is when you are unconscious and feel nothing during your operation. Your Anaesthetist will give you drugs to send and keep you asleep, often into your veins but sometimes with a gas. Most operations will be carried out under general anaesthetic. An Anaesthetist (a doctor specialising in caring for you during your operation) will discuss your anaesthetic on the day of your operation and this will include the pros and cons of each type of anaesthetic that might be possible for you.

Before you arrive in hospital

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

On the day of your operation

You will have been 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. Before you go to sleep 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, this will be used give you the anaesthetic drugs. This may cause some discomfort when the drugs are injected and you may develop bruising at the site of the cannula.

We may give you oxygen via a mask before you go to sleep. To make sure you breathe effectively when you are asleep we will insert a 'tube' into your mouth which will be removed as you start waking up. You will then be taken to a recovery room where you will be looked after until you are completely awake and any pain after your operation is treated.

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/drug-driving>

What are the side effects and risks of a General Anaesthetic?

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.

Very common or common risks and side effects (approx. 1 in 10 to 1 in 100)

- Feeling sick or vomiting
- Sore throat
- Damage to lips or tongue (minor)
- Muscle aches and pains
- Itching
- Confusion or memory impairment

Uncommon (approx. 1 in 1000)

- Damage to teeth
- Chest infections
- Breathing difficulties
- Existing medical conditions getting worse

Rare risk (less than 1 in 10 000)

- Damage to eyes
- Allergic reactions
- Nerve damage
- Awareness under general anaesthetic, this may happen if you are not receiving enough anaesthetic to keep you completely unconscious.
- Death

For help giving up smoking: Smokefree Norfolk - 0800 854 113

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