

Your child's general anaesthetic

Children's Services

The aim of this booklet

This booklet explains what to expect when your child comes into hospital to have an operation or investigation under general anaesthesia.

You can find more detailed information at

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo>

Or contact the Anaesthetic Office Secretary on 01902 695121 during office hours which are:

Monday - Friday between 8.30am and 4.30pm

What is anaesthesia?

The word 'anaesthesia' means 'loss of sensation'.

- A general anaesthetic ensures that your child is completely unconscious and free of pain during a test (investigation) or operation.
- Anaesthetists are specialist doctors who are responsible for the wellbeing of your child throughout surgery and are also closely involved with your child's pain relief after surgery.

Do I have a choice how is the Anaesthetic given?

- It is often possible for you and your child to choose how the anaesthetic and other medicines are given. Sometimes there are medical reasons why things have to be done in a certain way – these will be explained to you.
- The Anaesthetist will explain and agree what has been planned taking into consideration your wishes and those of your child.
- We want to work with you to provide the best possible care for your child and family.

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- **Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available**
- **If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111**
- **Keep the environment clean and tidy**
- **Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.**

How can I prepare my child for coming into hospital?

There are many things that you can do to prepare your child for coming into hospital.

All children (except infants too young to understand) should be told:

- That they are going into hospital
- That they will be having an operation or investigation
- Some basic information about what will happen to them when they are in hospital.

Everything should be explained to your child in a way that he/she can understand. Many hospitals have play staff on the children's ward that can give explanations and encourage discussion through play.

Please phone the hospital to re-schedule your appointment if your child develops a severe cough, cold or is not as well as they normally are for any other reason or has contact with chicken pox shortly before the day of the operation or investigation.

What happens on the day of Admission?

Pre-operative visit

- An anaesthetist should visit you on the ward before the procedure to discuss your child's anaesthetic
- The anaesthetist needs to find out about your child's general health, previous experiences of anaesthesia, any medicines your child is taking and any allergies he or she might have
- For practical reasons, the anaesthetist who comes to see you on the ward may not always be the same one who gives your child's anaesthetic, but the information you give them will be passed on.

Could the operation or investigation be delayed or cancelled?

- Occasionally the anaesthetist may learn something about your child that means it would be safer not to do the procedure on that day
- This could happen if your child has a bad cold, has a rash or has eaten food too recently.

Why must my child have nothing to eat or drink for a period of time?

- The hospital gives you clear instructions about fasting (not eating or drinking). It is important for your child to follow these.
- If there is food or liquid in your child's stomach during the anaesthetic, it could come up into the back of the throat and damage his or her lungs potentially leading to very serious complications.

These are the times before their operation/procedure that you can give your child something to eat or drink:

- 6 hours or more before - your child may have a light meal, a glass of milk or a fizzy drink
- 6 hours or more before - Bottle fed babies may have formula feed
- 4 hours or more before - Babies may have breast milk
- 2 hours or more before - all children and babies may have a drink of water or dilute cordial (but not a fizzy drink, milk or fruit juice.)
- Sweets, mints, toffees and chewing gum are considered food and will require a 6 hour delay or cancellation of the operation/procedure for that day.

What is pre-medication?

- Pre-medication is the name for drugs which are sometimes given before an anaesthetic, although today they are given less often
- Some pre-medication's help your child to relax, and some are related to the kind of surgery he or she will be having
- The pre-medication is given some time before the anaesthetic. They may make your child drowsier afterwards and if you plan to take him or her home on the same day, this may be delayed.

What happens in the anaesthetic room?

- A nurse from the ward will accompany you to the anaesthetic room. Your child will be able to take a toy or comforter
- If you wish, you will usually be welcome to stay with your child until he or she is unconscious. However, there are a few circumstances when this will not be possible
- It might be possible to give the anaesthetic while your child is sitting on your lap. Your child may either have an anaesthetic gas to breathe or an injection through a cannula
- Some children prefer gas and some prefer injections. If both methods are safe for your child, you or the child may be able to choose which is used
- The anaesthetist generally cups a hand over the child's nose and mouth or uses a face-mask to give the anaesthetic gas
- If the anaesthetic is given by gas, it will take a little while for your child to be anaesthetised. He or she may become restless as the gases take effect
- If an injection is used, your child will normally become unconscious very quickly indeed. Some parents may find this frightening.

What is Magic Cream?

- We apply a local anaesthetic cream to numb your child's hand or arm before giving an injection. We often refer to this as 'Magic Cream'.

What happens next?

- Your child will be taken into the operating theatre to have the operation or investigation. The anaesthetist will monitor your child's blood pressure, pulse and breathing closely and also temperature where indicated, throughout the procedure ensuring that he or she is safe and fully unconscious.

What happens after surgery?

Most children go to a recovery room. Each child is cared for by trained theatre nurses or operating department practitioners until he or she has regained consciousness and is comfortable enough to return to the ward.

What if my child is in pain?

- Pain relieving drugs are given during the anaesthetic to ensure that your child is as comfortable as possible after surgery. The type and strength of pain relief given will depend on the procedure
- You will have a chance to discuss and help plan the kind of pain relief (analgesia) your child will get after their operation.

What are some of the ways of giving pain relief?

- Syrups and tablets – just like at home
- Melts – medicines that ‘melt in your mouth’ – these are especially suitable for older children
- Suppositories – some pain relieving medicines like paracetamol can be given rectally (into the bottom). These are often given while your child is anaesthetised and last for several hours. Suppositories are very helpful when children cannot take medicines by mouth or are feeling sick
- Local anaesthetics – these are injected near the nerves around the operation site to numb the area. The injections are given while your child is anaesthetised and the pain relief lasts for several hours
- Caudal epidural – an injection of local anaesthetic near the nerves at the bottom of the spine to provide pain relief. The child will be asleep when the injection is given. Depending on the local anaesthetic used, your child may be unable to feel or move their legs for the first few hours.

Strong pain relieving drugs – such as morphine can be given in many different ways:-

- IV - intravenous – into a vein through a cannula
- IM - intramuscular – injection into the muscle
- S/C - Subcutaneous -injection under the skin once or repeated through a cannula
- Infusion – drugs given continuously by a special pump
- PCA - Patient Controlled Analgesia – Infusion of pain relieving drugs controlled by a pump with a button which your child alone can push when they need a dose
- NCA - Nurse controlled Analgesia – Infusion of pain relieving drugs controlled by a pump with a button that their nurse will push as needed to give extra doses.

Will my child stay in hospital overnight?

- Most children have their investigations or operations carried out as ‘day stay’ patients and go home on the same day. They may experience some pain or discomfort on the first day or so. Usually the hospital will give you pain relieving medication to take home with you and explain how this should be taken
- Occasionally children may feel sick after they have left hospital, or even vomit. This sometimes happens in the car on the way home.

Sometimes children do not sleep well after a stay in hospital. Their behaviour might be a little bit more clingy or difficult than before. This is a normal reaction to a stay in hospital, and will usually return to normal within 3 – 4 weeks.

If you have any concerns about your child when you get home you should contact the Paediatric Assessment Unit using the telephone number provided at the end of the leaflet.

Are there any side effects or 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
- Most children recover quickly and are soon back to normal after their operation and anaesthetic. Some children may suffer side effects like sickness or a sore throat. These usually last only a short time and there are medicines available to treat them if necessary
- The exact likelihood of complications depends on your child’s medical condition and on the nature of the surgery and anaesthesia your child needs. The anaesthetist can discuss this with you in detail at the pre-operative visit.

For a child in good health having minor surgery:

- 1 child in 10 (like one person in a large family) might experience a headache, sore throat, sickness or dizziness
- 1 child in 100 (like one person in a street) might be mildly allergic to one of the drugs that have been given
- 1 child in 20,000 (like one person in a small town) might develop a serious reaction (allergy) to the anaesthetic.

Questions you may like to ask the Anaesthetist

- Who will give my child's anaesthetic?
- What type of anaesthetic do you recommend?
- Have you often used this type of anaesthetic?
- What are the risks of this type of anaesthetic?
- Does my child have any special risks?
- How will my child feel afterwards?

Contact Details

Paediatric Assessment Unit 01902 695047

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。