

GENERAL ANAESTHETIC

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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 going on around you. Afterwards you will not remember anything that has happened.

Your anaesthetic will be given to you by an anaesthetist (doctor trained in anaesthesia) who is usually assisted by a trained healthcare practitioner (either a nurse or an anaesthesia technician).

A general anaesthetic may be recommended for your operation. However, it is your decision to go ahead with a general anaesthetic or not.

How is anaesthetic given?

Most people are sent to sleep by injecting the drugs through a drip (small tube) into a vein. For some people it may be more appropriate to go to sleep by breathing an anaesthetic gas through a face-mask.

You will be kept asleep for as long as is needed either by giving you more of the small drug into the vein or by breathing anaesthetic gases. Your anaesthetist will also give you drugs to reduce pain and sickness after the procedure. Your anaesthetist will monitor you closely and will let the drugs wear off to allow you to wake up slowly.

Pre-Anaesthetic Assessment

Your health will need to be assessed prior to the general anaesthetic. A pre-admission review will need to be completed. Your surgeon will give you the details for this. Further clarification may be necessary.

Death is a serious complication of general anaesthetic but it is extremely rare. It occurs more frequently in emergency surgery or those with ill health. As such, there may be additional tests done prior to your anaesthetic. For example:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG) – record the electrical activity of your heart
- Blood tests
- Lung-function tests

Sometimes because of the results, the anaesthetist may recommend that you be seen by your medical GP or another specialist to improve your medical condition before surgery. Specific instructions regarding what you need to do before the procedure will be given to you.

How soon will you recover?

A general anaesthetic can affect your judgement and reactions for the first 24 hours. You should not drive, operate machinery, do any potentially dangerous activities, sign legal documents or drink alcohol during this time.

If you go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. You should be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you have any questions, please feel free to discuss further with your surgeon or anaesthetist.