

NITROUS OXIDE

Written by Dr Mark Daniel Atkinson

Nitrous oxide or 'happy gas' is a safe and effective way to provide some mild anxiolysis during medical treatment. It involves breathing a mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen throughout the procedure via a mask that fits over the nose. It is very safe and is suitable for cooperative children and adults. It is useful to reduce fear and anxiety especially with injections. Nitrous oxide is useful as an anxiolytic, but the level of sedation is a lot less compared to IV sedation or general anaesthetic.

The dose is slowly titrated up until the therapeutic effects are achieved. Patients who undergo nitrous oxide will describe the experience as "being aware" that they were having treatment, "but not caring". It does not have any analgesic (painkilling) effects so local anaesthetic via an injection around the surgical site is still needed. The benefits of nitrous oxide over other forms of sedation are that the effects wear off very quickly; allowing a swift return to feeling normal.

Nitrous oxide is the safest form of sedation and is appropriate in most patients. It is contraindicated in those with upper respiratory tract infections or a 'blocked nose', and patients who are pregnant. The effects wear off very quickly. It is recommended that someone is with you to escort you home, but you can go about normal daily life after you leave the clinic.

If you decide to proceed with nitrous oxide, you can eat and drink as normal before the procedure (you do not need to fast). It is advisable to not have too heavy a meal otherwise you may feel bloated or nauseous. It is advisable to have a responsible adult to bring you to and from the appointment and accompany you home.

Please ask your surgeon if you have any further questions about nitrous oxide or any other forms of sedation.

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