

## While you are under the anaesthetic

- Your anaesthetist will stay with you all the time.
- They will make sure that you are okay and give you enough anaesthetic and painkillers to stop you from becoming conscious during your operation.
- There will be equipment to monitor your heart and breathing.

## Waking up afterwards

- Operations take different lengths of time, but as soon as the operation is finished, the anaesthetist will stop giving you the anaesthetic drugs. This will allow you to wake up about five minutes later.
- You'll wake up in the recovery room, where a member of the theatre team will be looking after you.
- How you feel afterwards will depend on the type of operation and anaesthetic you have had. Common side effects include a sore throat, feeling sick and shivering. You can have treatment for all of these problems to help you feel better.

## Treating pain

- It is important to treat pain, and some people (and some types of operation) need more painkillers than others.
- It is easier to treat pain before it gets bad, so you should ask for help if you are in pain.

## Back on the ward

- You may feel very tired at first.
- If you have any problems, let someone know so they can help you.
- When you can eat and drink again will depend on the type of operation and painkillers you have had.
- You will stay in hospital until it is safe to let you go home. Many people can go home on the same day as their operation.

## Risks of anaesthesia

- Serious problems after modern anaesthesia are extremely uncommon. You can find out more about the risks of anaesthesia at: [www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients-and-relatives/risks](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients-and-relatives/risks).

## Local and regional anaesthesia

- Sometimes you can choose to stay awake during your surgery. In that case, you can have injections to numb a part of your body so you don't feel pain.
- If you think you might prefer this, you could read more about it at [www.rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo).

## If you want to find out more

- Leaflets called 'You and your anaesthetic' and 'Anaesthesia explained' may be available from your local hospital.
- You can get more information at: [www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo).

## Tell us what you think

- Help us to improve this leaflet by e-mailing The Royal College of Anaesthetists with your views at [comms@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@rcoa.ac.uk)

**The Royal College of Anaesthetists and Association of Paediatric Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland**  
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Churchill House  
35 Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4SG

tel 020 7092 1500  
fax 020 7092 1730  
email [comms@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@rcoa.ac.uk)



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# General anaesthesia

A brief guide for young people



## General anaesthesia

- This is when your anaesthetist uses drugs to make you unconscious so that you can't see, hear or feel anything.
- General anaesthesia is essential for some operations and medical tests.

## Anaesthetists

- Doctors who have had specialist training in how to give anaesthetics.
- You will meet your anaesthetist before your operation. They will ask about your health, agree a plan with you for your anaesthetic and controlling your pain, and answer your questions.

## Consent

- Nothing will happen until you and your parent or guardian understand and agree with what has been planned for you.
- You can get more information about consent at [www.rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo)

## Getting ready for your anaesthetic

### Your health

- You need to be as healthy as possible when you have an anaesthetic.
- Avoid breathing cigarette smoke for six weeks before your operation.
- If you have any long-term medical problems, you or your parent or carer should arrange a check up with your GP or specialist.

- Bring your medicines with you to the hospital. For your own safety, your anaesthetist needs to know if you are on the contraceptive pill or using any recreational drugs.
- Your anaesthetist will need to know about any allergies you have.

### Jewellery

- You will be asked to remove jewellery, make-up, nail varnish and decorative piercings. If you cannot remove your jewellery, it can be covered with tape to prevent damage to it or to your skin.

### Fasting

- The hospital should give you clear instructions about when you should stop eating and drinking before your operation. It is important to follow these instructions.
- If there is food or liquid in your stomach during your anaesthetic, it could come up to the back of your throat and then get down into your lungs.

### Clothing

- Wear something loose and comfortable that is easy to wash afterwards.
- Bring something to change into to go home.
- You may be asked to wear a hospital gown for your operation.
- Usually you can keep most of your underwear on.

### Filling the time

- There's often a lot of waiting around.
- Bring something to do (for example, a book, magazine or MP3 player). You may have to turn off your mobile phone.

## Having an anaesthetic

- Your anaesthetist will usually start your anaesthetic in a room next to the operating theatre, called the anaesthetic room.
- Your anaesthetist can start your anaesthetic by giving you an injection into a cannula (see below) or by asking you to breathe in a gas that smells a bit like felt-tip pens. The injection is the quickest way, but both make you feel light headed before you become unconscious. Sometimes you can choose which to have. If you breathe the gas, you will have a cannula put in once you are unconscious, so the anaesthetist can give you painkillers, other medicines and fluids during your operation.
- If you want, your parent or a carer may be able to stay with you until you are unconscious. After that, they can wait for you in a waiting room or back on the ward.

### Cannula

- This is a thin, flexible plastic tube that is put into a vein, usually on the back of your hand.
- A needle is used to put the cannula in, then the needle is removed straight away.
- Before you leave the ward, you may be offered a numbing cream for the back of your hand to reduce the pain of having a cannula.
- Once the cannula is in place, your medicines can be injected through it without using any more needles.
- Your cannula is usually left in place after the operation in case you need painkillers or other medicines later.