

# Your Anaesthetic

You have received this information leaflet as you or a family member requires an anaesthetic for an operation or other hospital procedure. This leaflet provides basic information about your anaesthetic and your anaesthetist. If there is anything that you don't understand, please ask your anaesthetist when you come to the hospital.

## Your anaesthetist

Your anaesthetist is a highly trained doctor. They spend six years obtaining their medical degree then spend another seven years completing exams and practical experience before qualifying as a specialist anaesthetist. This experience includes all types of anaesthesia plus other specialised training to support this role.

You will meet your anaesthetist on the day of your surgery or procedure and be assessed, or you may be required to meet them prior to the day of surgery or procedure for an assessment.

Your anaesthetist is responsible for looking after you before your surgery, during your surgery and after your surgery. They provide the best pain management possible. They will work with you to create a plan for your operation or procedure that you are both happy with.

The type of anaesthesia that you require will depend on the type, location and length of your surgery.

### General anaesthesia

You are put into a state of unconsciousness for the whole operation. This involves an injection of special drugs or breathing a special gas to anaesthetise you. You will be unaware of what is happening but the anaesthetist and his trained technician will always be with you and monitoring your condition.

### Regional anaesthesia

A nerve block numbs the part of the body where the surgeon operates. This is often used for orthopaedic

surgery. Examples of some of these used at Chelsea are; spinal anaesthetic, arm blocks and eye blocks. A local anaesthetic is injected near the nerve pathways to the part of your body that is being operated on to keep you comfortable. This may be used with general anaesthetic to provide post-op pain relief or you may be given drugs to make you sleepy and relaxed during the operation (monitored sedation).

### Local anaesthesia

A local anaesthetic is injected at the operation site to cause numbness. You will be awake.

### Monitored sedation

Your anaesthetist uses a special range of drugs to keep you comfortable and sleepy during your procedure.

## Before your operation

In order to provide the best care your anaesthetist requires information to plan the best anaesthetic for you. You may be asked to attend a preadmission assessment appointment by Chelsea Hospital. You will complete a medical history questionnaire when you complete your admission form for Chelsea.

If you are asked to attend a preadmission assessment appointment, the anaesthetist will arrange any tests or further follow-up that you may require. The anaesthetist would like you in the best shape possible for your operation or procedure. This may mean adjusting or stopping some medications and starting others if the anaesthetist prescribes them.

Other things you can do to help yourself before an anaesthetic are:

- Stop smoking
- If you are overweight – try to lose some weight

- Ensure that long term conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure are well controlled in consultation with your GP

## On the day of surgery

A nurse from Chelsea Hospital will ring you the day before your surgery with final instructions on when to come into hospital and when to stop eating and drinking. If your surgery is on a Monday, you may receive this call on Friday.

### Food and fluid

**It is important to follow the nurse's instructions on when to stop eating and drinking.** If there is food or fluid present in your stomach there is the potential for this to get into your lungs while you are under anaesthetic – damaging them.

### Medications

Please bring all your regular medications into hospital with you. Take all your usual medications unless instructed not to by the nurse, your surgeon or anaesthetist. It is ok to take your usual medications with a sip of water only.

### At the hospital

Your anaesthetist will meet with you before your operation or procedure and will provide information as well as asking some questions.

Expect to discuss:

- Health history, previous anaesthetics
- Type of anaesthetic
- Benefits and risks of types of anaesthesia

You will change into theatre clothes and may be given a premedication before you come to theatre. A premed may be pain relief or your anaesthetist may order something to relax you if you are anxious about your operation or procedure.

Nothing will go ahead until you are understood and agree with the anaesthetic planned for you.

You have the right to refuse if you do not want the treatment suggested.

## In the operating theatre

You will be accompanied to theatre by the anaesthetic technician (a trained assistant to the anaesthetist). The anaesthetist will meet you there and the surgical team – will check you in. They are all there to look after you.

Special monitoring equipment will be attached to you and an intravenous access (IV) is started in your arm.

The monitors help the anaesthetic team to watch your heart, blood pressure, oxygen level and breathing during your operation and the drip allows the anaesthetist to give you drugs quickly and safely as you require them.

Your anaesthetist and their technician stay with you for the entire operation checking you are comfortable and coping with the procedure. Their sole role is to look after you.

## After your operation

You will wake up in the recovery room where a specially trained nurse will care for you. You will have monitoring equipment attached when you wake up. When the nurse assesses you as being suitably recovered from your anaesthetic you will be returned to the ward.

### Day surgery

If you are going home the same day as your surgery, it is essential to have someone with you as the full effects of anaesthetic may take up to 24 hours to wear off. You should not drink alcohol, drive a car, use heavy or dangerous machinery or sign any important documents for 24 hours following your anaesthetic.

### Pain relief

Your anaesthetist is skilled in a range of methods used to treat pain and keep you comfortable. He/she will discuss with you what is most appropriate for you and your type of surgery.

You may be prescribed tablets or a liquid to swallow, IV medication which is given through the IV access in your arm, PCA which is a Patient Controlled Analgesia where the patient controls the delivery of their own pain relief via a machine connected to the IV or you may have received local anaesthetic which numbs the area or regional block which numbs the region of the surgery.

## Side effects and complications

The anaesthetist's aim is to provide you with a pleasant pain free awakening. Your anaesthetist is specially trained to deal with any problems that may arise but always remember that an anaesthetic is a major medical procedure. Like any other medical procedure there may be side effects and major complications. Risks are greater in very young or elderly, serious complications can occur in anyone, regardless of age or fitness.

Each type of anaesthesia has different side effects, risks and benefits and every patient reacts to and tolerates anaesthetic differently. The risk that you face will depend on your general health and the operation that you are having as well as personal factors, such as whether you smoke or have a high BMI (overweight).

## Side effects

Some of the more common side effects include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- A sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Elderly patients may become confused

Most side effects are easily managed and don't require further treatment.

## Major complications

Anaesthesia is safer now than it has ever been and is considered one of the safest medical interventions. However major complications can occur, including the risk of dying however this is a rare occurrence.

Rare complications include possibility of:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Major nerve or brain injury
- Organ failure or allergic reaction
- Awareness during procedure

The risk will be higher if you suffer from serious heart or lung conditions. Remember that your anaesthetist as well as the entire theatre team is trained to respond to any critical events that may occur during your anaesthetic.

## Cost of treatment

Chelsea Hospital should be able to provide you with an estimate of your anaesthetic fee for your surgery or procedure. This is an estimate and may change depending on procedure/surgery performed, theatre time and other factors. The final account may vary from the estimate.

If your surgery is covered by ACC, then your anaesthetic costs will be also.

We look forward to caring for you at Chelsea Hospital.

Questions for my anaesthetist....

#### Sources for further information

The NZ Society of Anaesthetists – [www.anaesthesia.nz](http://www.anaesthesia.nz)

Health and Disability Commission – [www.hdc.org.nz](http://www.hdc.org.nz)

The Australia and NZ College of Anaesthetists – [www.anzca.edu.au](http://www.anzca.edu.au)

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