



Anaesthetics for Children

What do I need to know about anaesthetics?

You are probably reading this leaflet because your child or a child you care for needs to have an operation or procedure that requires an anaesthetic. This leaflet will help you understand what is going on and why, so that you can better explain and support the child through the experience.

When small children need an operation they will have a general anaesthetic like an adult. These are drugs that send you to sleep so your child does not feel, see or hear anything during the operation.

This leaflet might not explain everything you want to know. If you do not understand what is going to happen when an anaesthetic is given, or if you have any questions please talk to your anaesthetist when he or she comes to see you before the operation.

Who is the anaesthetist?

The person providing the anaesthetic is called an anaesthetist. An anaesthetist is a fully qualified doctor and the most senior anaesthetists are consultants. Anaesthetists' special skills help to make surgery as safe and successful as possible.

Consultants give the majority of anaesthetics, and as this trust is a teaching hospital a resident anaesthetist in training may care for your child. No one will care for your child unless they are adequately capable. Residents called Core Trainees (CTs) and Specialist Trainees (STs) are always supervised by a consultant.

What does the anaesthetist do?

The anaesthetist is responsible for giving your child their anaesthetic and stays with them all the time during the operation carefully monitoring him or her. To ensure they can do this safely they will ask you what operation or procedure your child is having, and questions about your child's medical history. These will include asking if your child has had an anaesthetic before, if he or she is taking any medicines or has any allergies. This helps them to decide the best way to look after the child.

How will my child be given the anaesthetic?

Your anaesthetist will always see you before your operation (unless it is very urgent) and talk to you about what will happen including discussing options for going to sleep. If your child has had an anaesthetic before and would like to go to sleep in the same way or has had a previous unpleasant experience please tell your anaesthetist.

Together you will come to an agreement about whether this will be either:

- An injection through a cannula

Or

- Anaesthetic gas through a face mask

If your child is having an injection through a cannula, anaesthetic cream is usually placed on the back of their hands at least half an hour before coming to theatre to numb the skin. On arrival to theatre, the cream is removed and the arm tightly squeezed whilst a thin plastic tube is inserted.

If your child is having anaesthetic gas it may take a little longer for them to go to sleep and some children become restless and may make jerky movements as the gas takes effect. This is a normal and expected reaction.

Sometimes the anaesthetist may need to change between these two methods in theatre, for example if cannula fails or the child becomes anxious; so we routinely explain and discuss both methods with children.

Once your child is asleep and unconscious a nurse will take you back to the ward before the operation begins. It is usually possible for parents to collect the child from recovery with the nurse when the child is awake. Children are returned to the ward as soon as it is safe to do so. The anaesthetist will monitor the child while they are under anaesthetic and will advise on pain relief needed for after the operation.

What should I tell my child?

It is really important to be honest with your child and make sure they know they are coming to hospital. Please use storybooks, play and/or the Little Journey App (free to download from App store) to help you prepare your child.

Age 2 - 3 years – start preparing your child the day before

Age 4 - 7 years – start preparing your child 4 - 7 days before

Age 8 years and over – start preparing from decision to operate

What are the risks involved in having an anaesthetic?

Modern anaesthetics are very safe. There are common side effects which are usually not serious or long lasting. Your anaesthetist will discuss any specific likely risks with you before the operation.

Very common (More than 1 in 10): Sore throat, agitation on waking (especially age 1-6 years), sickness, temporary anxiety/sleep problems/ bedwetting

Common (Between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100): Minor lip/tongue injury, discomfort at injection site

Uncommon (Between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000): Breathing problems, skin damage

Rare (Between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000): Injury to eye eg. scratch, damage to teeth, unplanned need for admission to intensive care

Very rare (Between 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 100,000 or more): severe allergic reaction, awareness during anaesthetic, long term disability (less than 1 in 100,000), death due to anaesthesia (1 in 100,000 to 1 in a million)

Additional sources of information:

Further information about anaesthetic procedures can be found online.

The Royal College of Anaesthetists has a web site: www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo that gives further information about anaesthetics. On this website you can find patient story leaflets and activities including:

- 'Rees bear has an anaesthetic' - a story for younger children
- 'Davy the detective: finding out about anaesthetics' – a comic book story for older children
- 'Dennis has an anaesthetic' – a Beano comic strip targeted at children aged 7-11 years
- 'General anaesthesia: a brief guide for young people from 12 years old'

Useful books for preparing children:

- Going to the Hospital by Sue King (recommended age 2-5 years; story of child having tonsillectomy)
- My First Visit to Hospital by Rebecca Hunter (recommended age 4-8 years; story of child having grommets)

Useful videos for preparing children:

- <https://vimeo.com/488463932/ef16f64d3e> Video tour of Heartlands Children's Day Surgery Unit
- www.YouTube.com 'A little deep sleep' by Bristol Royal Hospital for Children

Contact us:

If you would like further advice, please speak to your doctor, or a member of staff. You can also telephone 0121 424 3438, our staff are always ready to help.

Please be helpful and respectful: think about what people might want to know about our patient information and this hospital and how your experiences might benefit others.

Please use polite and respectful words, and you cannot name individuals on the sites.

If you have any questions you may want to ask about your condition or your treatment or if there is anything you do not understand and you wish to know more about, please write them down and your doctor will be more than happy to try and answer them for you.

Accessibility

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