

Your child's general anaesthetic

Information for parents and guardians



What is a general anaesthetic?

A general anaesthetic is medication given so that your child is not conscious and cannot see, hear or feel anything during his procedure or operation.

What is an anaesthetist?

An anaesthetist (sometimes called an anaesthesiologist) is a specialist doctor who gives the anaesthetic and looks after your child throughout their procedure. Our role is to make sure that your child is safe and comfortable, and receives the pain relief he needs.

Before you come to hospital:

Your child should be prepared for his procedure in words he can understand.

You should receive clear instructions about when your child can eat and drink before his procedure. It is important to follow these instructions, as any food or liquid in your child's stomach could come up into his throat and damage his lungs during the anaesthetic. To make this easier for your child please do not eat or drink in front of them.

Your child can have a **light meal or cow's milk / formula milk up to SIX HOURS** before surgery.

Babies can be **breastfed up to FOUR HOURS** before surgery.

Children can drink **CLEAR LIQUIDS (i.e. anything you could read a newspaper through) like water, apple juice or Oros up to TWO HOURS** before surgery, but not fizzy drinks or anything containing dairy, e.g. Tropicana, or particles e.g. orange juice.

Before the operation:

Your anaesthetist will visit you in the ward before coming to theatre. Please tell us about any relevant medical problems, allergies and previous operations your child may have had. If your child has had a recent cough or cold or chicken pox, please let us know. We will discuss any concerns or questions you may have, and will talk through options of pain relief for your child where required.

Occasionally we may need to delay a procedure to make it safer for your child, for example if he has a chest infection, or has eaten too recently.

Some children may benefit from having medicine before they come to theatre to make them less anxious. This can be discussed with your anaesthetist.

Going to "sleep".

You will be able to come into theatre with your child. Please feel free to bring something that makes him feel comfortable, like a favourite blanket, book or a dummy. You are welcome to bring something to distract him while he goes off to sleep, like his favourite game or movie on your iPad or phone.

The general anaesthetic is given either by medication injected into a vein or as gas to breathe. Your anaesthetist will discuss the best option for your child with you before coming to theatre.

Please let us know if your child has any preferences – some children have had procedures before and may prefer one thing over another.

If your child decides to have the injected anaesthetic, we will put local anaesthetic numbing cream onto his hands before you come to theatre.

If the anaesthetic medicine is breathed in, we use a mask that fits over your child's mouth and nose. The gases can smell a bit, like nail polish remover or koki pens, but they are not painful. This method takes a little longer to work and your child might make some funny wriggling movements as they go off to sleep. These are normal and we will talk you through them.

We understand that not all parents feel able to come into theatre with their child. There is no pressure on you to come into theatre if you don't feel up to it. We are there to take care of your child for you.

During the operation:

The anaesthetist will be with your child throughout the procedure, monitoring him continuously and giving whatever fluid, medication and pain relieving medicine he requires.

Afterwards.

After the procedure, your child will be taken to the Recovery Room where he will be looked after by trained recovery nurses. When your child is awake enough, you will be called into the Recovery Room to be with him. Please bring anything he may find comforting, like a favourite toy, blanket, or a bottle. Be aware that your child might seem confused by the unfamiliar environment and the effects of the medication and may not recognize you at first. This is common and will pass.

When you get home, some children are a little clingier than usual and have disturbed sleep patterns for a couple of days. Your reassurance is all that is required.

Side effects and complications.

The most common side effects are mild, resolve quickly, and can be treated. They include nausea (with or without vomiting), a sore throat and a headache. Your child might also feel "jetlagged" or generally out of sorts for a while.

More serious problems like allergic reactions to medication are rare and monitored for.

Any specific complication relating to your child's procedure will be discussed with you.

Risk.

As with driving your car, no procedure can be guaranteed to be risk free; however, modern anaesthetic techniques, medication, monitoring and training continue to make anaesthesia safer.

If you have any questions about your child's procedure, please feel free to raise them with your anaesthetist.