

Having a general anaesthetic

Information for patients

Easy read

This booklet explains what will happen when you have a **general anaesthetic**.

You might want to ask someone to help you read it.

Let someone know if there is anything that you do not understand.

General anaesthetic

You may have been told you will need to have a **general anaesthetic** for an operation or procedure.

If you feel worried about this you are not alone. Feeling worried about having a procedure in hospital is a very normal feeling. Lots of people feel this way.

This booklet will help you understand what will happen before, during and after your general anaesthetic so that you know what to expect.

What is a general anaesthetic?

A general anaesthetic is a type of medicine that helps you have a really deep sleep.

When you are asleep:

- You will not feel any pain.
- You will not see or hear what is happening.
- The doctor will wake you up when the operation or procedure is finished.

The doctors and nurses will take good care of you the whole time to keep you safe.

What to bring

It is helpful to think about what to bring with you to the hospital.

Bringing things from home that you find comforting can help you feel more relaxed during your hospital visit.

You might want to read a book or magazine, listen to music through headphones, do a puzzle, or some colouring.

If you are staying overnight, do not forget to take your pyjamas and your toothbrush.

What to do before

It is very important that you do not have anything to eat for **6 hours before** you have a general anaesthetic.

Usually the doctor will ask you to not eat after midnight the night before your operation.

Your doctor will tell you more about when to stop eating and drinking.

What will happen?

When you arrive at the hospital you will meet a nurse.

The nurse will give you a special bracelet to wear on your wrist. It will have your name and birthday written on it.

The nurse will weigh you and measure how tall you are.

The nurse will put a cuff around your arm to check your **blood pressure**. It feels like a tight hug on your arm.

The nurse will take your temperature.

The nurse will put a plastic clip on your finger. It is called a **pulse oximeter**. It does not hurt and it measures how well oxygen is being sent to parts of your body.

Who else will I meet?

You will meet an **anaesthetist** (a specially trained doctor).

Their job is to keep you safe and fast asleep during your operation.

They will tell you about the best way for you to have the medicine that makes you go to sleep.

You will also meet the doctor who will be doing your operation or procedure.

They will come and say hello.

What will happen?

The doctor may put a tiny straw (called a **cannula**) in the back of your hand.

Don't worry. The doctor can use cream so the straw does not hurt.

If you are feeling worried the doctor may give you some medicine to drink in a cup or syringe to help you feel more relaxed.

Going for the operation

When it is time for your operation you will go down the corridor with your nurse to have the medicine that will make you go to sleep.

You may have been asked to change into a hospital gown but you may be able to wear your own clothes or pyjamas.

Falling asleep usually takes a few seconds (if you have the medicine through a cannula) to a couple of minutes.

Having your sleep medication

The doctor may ask you to breathe the special sleep medicine through a mask by gently placing it near your nose and mouth.

The mask smells a bit like felt tip pens.

Or the doctor may give you the sleep medicine through the little straw in your hand (a cannula).

They will tell you which one you will have before your operation or procedure so that you know what to expect.

During your procedure

A nurse, the anaesthetist, an anaesthetist assistant and surgeon will be in the room during your operation or procedure.

The anaesthetist will stay with you all the way through the procedure.

They will monitor your heart rate, blood pressure, pulse, breathing and oxygen levels closely, to help you stay safe and fully asleep.

Everyone will take good care of you.

When you wake up

When your operation or procedure is finished, the anaesthetist will help you slowly wake up by gently stopping the sleep medicine.

When you wake up you will be in a special room called the **recovery room**. A nurse will be looking after you.

You may have the little straw in the back of your hand (**cannula**) when you wake up. This is in case you need to have medicines later.

Having medicines through the cannula helps it get around your body quicker.

After your operation

Some people say they feel a bit sleepy and their throat is a bit of a dry when they wake from their general anaesthetic. This is normal.

You may feel a little bit cold, so the nurse may give you a blanket to keep you warm.

The doctor will usually give you some medicine when you wake up.

You may start to feel hungry after your operation and you may be able to have something to eat and drink.

You may go home later that day or you may need to stay in hospital a little longer. The doctor will let you know.

Going home

Once the doctors say you are ready, you can go home.

You may feel a bit tired when you get home so you could rest on the sofa watching your favourite show or relax doing your favourite calming things.

Breathing exercises

It can be helpful to do some breathing exercises if you feel worried.

Practise your breathing exercises at home before you go to hospital so you are more comfortable using them when you need to.

Exercise 1: Breathing for comfort

Exercise 2: Box Breathing Practice

Video and audio

You can watch a video that explains **what happens when you have a general anaesthetic**.

Click on the link to watch the video: Anaesthesia – General anaesthetic

You can listen to some recordings to help **prepare your mind before surgery**.

Click on the link to listen to the recordings: [Preparing your mind before surgery](#)

If you need help

If you have any questions or need to talk to someone, you can contact the Endoscopy Team.

Our telephone number is: 01633 238706.

Our email address is:

ABB.EndoscopyPreAssessment@wales.nhs.uk

If you send an email, you should include your name and your hospital number.