General anaesthetics
An anaesthetic is a drug or agent that produces a complete or partial loss of feeling. There are three kinds of anaesthetic: general, regional and local. When a patient undergoes a general anaesthetic, they lose sensation and become unconscious.

General anaesthetics can be given in a number of ways. One method is by injecting drugs into your veins, and another method is by anaesthetic gas given by inhalation through a mask. Sometimes, injections and the anaesthetic mask can be used at the same time.

Issues to consider with general anaesthetics

Your anaesthetist will visit you before you go to theatre to assess if you are fit enough for surgery, and to explain the administration of a general anaesthetic. You need to discuss a range of issues with your anaesthetist including:

- Medical history, including any pre-existing conditions, such as diabetes or heart problems
- Surgical history
- Allergies, for example, to drugs or foods
- Drugs you may be taking, including cigarettes and alcohol.

Other issues which your doctor or nursing staff may discuss with you include:

- **Eating and drinking** – usually you will be asked not to drink or eat for several hours before the operation.
- **Shaving** – you may need hair shaved from the operation site,
- **Other procedures** – you may need an enema or other pre-operative procedures.

Administration of general anaesthetic

A couple of hours prior to surgery, you may be given a ‘pre-med’, which may be an injection or tablets that make you sleepy and relaxed. These drugs also help to dry up excessive saliva.

You are then wheeled into the operating theatre. A qualified anaesthetist, who is a medical doctor with specialist training in anaesthetics, administers the general anaesthetic. The anaesthetist may administer the anaesthetic intravenously or by gas mask, or both. After a few seconds, you feel sleepy then lose consciousness.

Next, the anaesthetist inserts a small tube connected to a ventilator into your airway. The anaesthetist controls the length of time you are asleep, and constantly monitors your pulse, breathing and blood pressure. If necessary, your anaesthetist will give you intravenous fluids before, during and after surgery.

Once the surgery is over, you may have other drugs injected that will reverse the effect of the anaesthetic and any other drugs used during the operation (such as muscle relaxant). When the anaesthetist is satisfied with your breathing and blood circulation, you are wheeled into the recovery room where specialised staff members look after you.

Following surgery with general anaesthetic

After surgery, you can expect that hospital staff will:

- Record your breathing, pulse and blood pressure.
- Note your level of consciousness, as well as any special observations required for your type of surgery.
- Record all intravenous fluids you are given.

Depending on the type of surgery you’ve had, you may find that when you wake up you:

- Have a tube coming from your wound site to drain excess fluid.
- Had a catheter inserted into your bladder while you are in theatre and your urine output is being noted.
- Are encouraged to do deep breathing exercises and move your legs at least hourly following surgery, if you can.
Are given pain relief medication. Feel drowsy and nauseous, with a headache and sore throat. These side effects pass relatively quickly.

Complications with general anaesthetics

Some of the rare but possible side effects from general anaesthetic include:
- Injury at the injection site
- Infection
- Breathing problems
- Short term damage to nerves
- Allergic reaction, for example, asthma attack
- Having sensation (and pain) during the operation
- Damage to the mouth, teeth, lips or tongue
- Damage to vocal cords or larynx
- Lung damage
- Heart attack
- Brain damage
- Stroke
- Kidney failure
- Liver failure
- Paraplegia
- Quadriplegia.

Taking care of yourself at home

Be guided by your doctor or anaesthetist, but general suggestions include:
- If you are permitted to leave hospital within hours of the surgery, don’t try to drive home because your coordination may be affected by the medication. Ask a relative or friend to pick you up or take a taxi.
- Don’t drive a car within 24 hours after the procedure.
- Take it easy for the next day or two. Rest at home. Remember it may take several days before you feel back to normal.
- Avoid taking herbal medicines in the days or weeks following surgery. Ask your doctor for further information.

Long term outlook after a general anaesthetic

Complications from general anaesthetic are rare. It is estimated that around one in every 10,000 people undergoing general anaesthetic die from an unforeseen complication, such as an allergic reaction or a heart attack.

Regional and local anaesthetics

Depending on the type of surgery, alternatives to general anaesthetic can include:
- Regional anaesthetic – or ‘nerve block’. For example, a woman giving birth by caesarean section may have an epidural. This is an injection into the spine that numbs the body from the waist down.
- Local anaesthetic – anaesthetic is injected into the immediate area to be operated on. For example, your dentist may inject local anaesthetic into your gum before removing a tooth.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Anaesthetist

Things to remember

- An anaesthetic is a drug or agent that produces a complete or partial loss of feeling.
- There are three kinds of anaesthetic: general, regional and local.
- When a patient undergoes a general anaesthetic, they lose sensation and become unconscious.

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More information

Surgery

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab
Types of surgery

- **Brain surgery**
  
  Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid...

- **Day surgery and anaesthesia**

  Day surgery is completed in one day, usually the person does not have to stay in hospital overnight.

- **Surgery**

  Ask your doctor or surgeon about the benefits, risks and possible side effects of surgery.

Exploratory surgery

- **Arthroscopy**

  Most people can resume normal activities around three weeks after an arthroscopy.

- **Biopsy**

  Before a biopsy, you need to discuss a range of issues with your doctor or surgeon.

- **Colonoscopy**

  A colonoscopy can be used to look for cancer of the colon (bowel cancer) or colon polyps, which are growths on the lining of the colon.

- **Endoscopy**

  An endoscope or fibrescope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other.

- **Laparoscopy**

  The advantage of laparoscopy is that only a small incision is required, which is why it is also known as 'keyhole surgery'.

Blood, tissue and organ donation

- **Blood donation**

  Donated blood is used to help people who are sick or injured, or for medical research.

- **Blood transfusion**

  Donated blood is screened for blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis and HIV.

- **Corneal transplantation and donation**

  Corneal transplant surgery would not be possible without generous donors and their families, who have donated corneal tissue so that others may see.

- **Kidney donation**

  Kidneys are often donated after death but more people are choosing to donate one of their kidneys while still alive (living kidney donation).

- **Organ and tissue donation**

  Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation, decide about becoming a donor and discuss your decision with the people close to you.

- **Organ and tissue transplantation**

  Transplantation varies depending on the transplant organ or tissue so speak with your medical team about surgical procedures, recovery and medications.

Plastic and cosmetic

- **Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)**

  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen.

- **Blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery)**

  Eyelid surgery, or blepharoplasty, aims to improve the appearance of the upper eyelids, lower eyelids or both.

- **Body contouring surgery**

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Body contouring is surgery to remove sagging skin and extra fat, and improve the shape and tone of underlying tissue.

- Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)
  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow.

- Breast implants (augmentation)
  Breast implants are inserted under the skin to create larger breasts.

- Breast reduction for men
  Breast reduction for men is surgery to correct overdeveloped or enlarged breasts.

- Breast reduction for women
  Breast reduction surgery removes excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a breast size in proportion with your body.

- Brow lift
  A brow lift is cosmetic surgery to correct a sagging forehead and repair frown lines.

- Cosmetic genital surgery - labiaplasty and phalloplasty
  Cosmetic genital surgery involves reshaping the labia, vulva or penis to alter their size or shape.

- Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral
  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities.

- Cosmetic surgery
  Cosmetic surgery carries risks and, in some cases, the results are not what you may anticipate.

- Cosmetic treatments - injectables
  Cosmetic injections into the skin can be used to reduce wrinkles.

- Ears - otoplasty
  Ear correction surgery, or otoplasty, is usually done to move prominent ears closer to the head or to reduce the size of large ears.

- Facelift (meloplasty)
  A facelift is a type of cosmetic surgery that removes or tightens facial skin to make a person look younger.

- Facial implants
  Facial implants are used by people who want to restore or improve the normal shape of their face.

- Hair transplant surgery
  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma.

- Liposuction
  Liposuction is invasive surgery and is not a substitute for weight reduction or a cure for obesity.

- Medical tourism and insurance
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...

- Nose - rhinoplasty
  Rhinoplasty may be performed for cosmetic reasons or to correct a structural problem.

Reproductive and contraception

- Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI
  IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

- Caesarean section
  A caesarean section is usually performed when it is safer for the mother or the baby than a vaginal birth.

- Contraception - tubal ligation
  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

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• **Contraception - vasectomy**
  Having a vasectomy does not affect a man’s ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

• **Dilatation and curettage (D&C)**
  A dilatation and curettage (D&C) is an operation performed on women to lightly scrape away the womb lining.

• **Hysterecomy**
  The conditions that prompt a hysterecomy can often be treated by other means, and hysterecomy should only be a last resort.

**A-Z of surgical procedures**

• **Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)**
  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen.

• **Appendectomy**
  An appendectomy is usually carried out on an emergency basis to treat appendicitis.

• **Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)**
  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow.

• **Brain surgery**
  Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid.

• **Breast reconstruction and mastectomy**
  Some women choose to have breast reconstruction surgery to give a similar appearance to the look of their original breast in normal clothes.

• **Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral**
  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities.

• **Craniotomy**
  A craniotomy is an operation to open the skull (cranium) in order to access the brain for surgical repair.

• **Endoscopy**
  An endoscope or fibrescope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other.

• **Eyes - laser eye surgery**
  During laser eye surgery, a computer-controlled laser is used to remove microscopic amounts of tissue from the front surface of the eye.

• **Hair transplant surgery**
  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma.

• **Heart bypass surgery**
  After heart bypass surgery, eat a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and cold-water fish.

• **Heart disease - angioplasty and stent procedures (video)**
  People with coronary heart disease talk about the medical procedures that followed their heart attack and diagnosis.

• **Kidneys - dialysis and transplant**
  People with kidney failure need dialysis or a transplant to stay alive.

• **Knee replacement surgery**
  Knee replacement surgery removes a diseased knee joint and replaces it with an artificial joint.

• **Laminectomy**
  A laminectomy is a surgical incision into the vertebra to obtain access to the spinal cord.

• **Laparotomy**
  A laparotomy is a surgical incision into the abdominal cavity used to examine the abdominal organs and aid diagnosis.

• **Myomectomy**
  A myomectomy is an operation performed to remove fibroids from the uterus.

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• Obesity surgery
  Obesity surgery is not a form of cosmetic surgery, nor an alternative to good eating habits and regular exercise.

• Tracheostomy
  A tracheostomy is a surgical procedure that involves making a cut in the trachea (windpipe) and inserting a tube into the opening.

• Transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) - for benign prostate disease
  Surgery on the prostate gland can have many side effects, including erectile problems and urinary incontinence.

Related Information

• Surgery
  Ask your doctor or surgeon about the benefits, risks and possible side effects of surgery.

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Related information on other websites

• General Anaesthesia Information.

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