

Frequently Asked Questions



Quality & Safety Advisory Committee

College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland

These FAQs are designed to provide general information.

Who is an Anaesthesiologist?

Anaesthesiologists are medical doctors who specialise in perioperative medicine, critical care, and pain management. They have expert knowledge in medications and techniques to safely manage your pain relief and level of consciousness during surgery. Anaesthesiologists closely monitor your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and other vital signs during your procedure. They also help manage your pain control and recovery immediately after surgery, making sure you remain safe and comfortable throughout your operation. You will meet your anaesthesiologist before your surgery, and they will answer any questions or concerns you may have.

For further information please refer to our section on general anaesthesia.



How safe is having a general anaesthetic?

Having a general anaesthetic today is very safe.

Modern anaesthetic drugs, advanced equipment, and highly trained anaesthesiologists mean that serious complications occurring during anaesthesia are extremely rare. However, it's important to understand the possible side effects and risks of general anaesthesia. Your anaesthesiologist is a specialist medical doctor trained to manage these risks and will take every precaution to keep you safe.

The risks of the surgery and general anaesthesia must be weighed up against the likely benefits of the operation. Acceptable risks will vary from person to person. It is important to remember that the likelihood of very rare serious events (for example, death or accidental awareness) happening is far lower than many risks we accept in everyday life; such as travelling by car.

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Is there anything I can do to reduce my risk during anaesthesia?

Your anaesthesiologist and surgical team will work with you to plan your operation to ensure you are as safe as possible.

You can play an important part in reducing your own risk before anaesthesia and surgery.

The following steps can help you prepare safely and recover more smoothly;

Before Your Operation

Attend all appointments.

Pre operative assessments and tests help your healthcare team identify any factors that could affect your anaesthetic and plan appropriately.

Bring an up to date list of your medications with you on admission to hospital.

Include all prescribed, over the counter, and herbal medicines or supplements. This helps your anaesthesiologist manage any medicine interactions or adjustments.

Follow instructions about taking your medications.

You'll be told which medications to continue or stop before surgery. Always follow this advice carefully.



Lifestyle choices that can make a difference

Stop or reduce smoking.

Quitting, even a few weeks before surgery, lowers your risk of breathing problems and improves healing. Support to stop smoking is available through the HSE Quit Programme, this is available on the HSE Health App.

If you vape, try to stop or cut back.

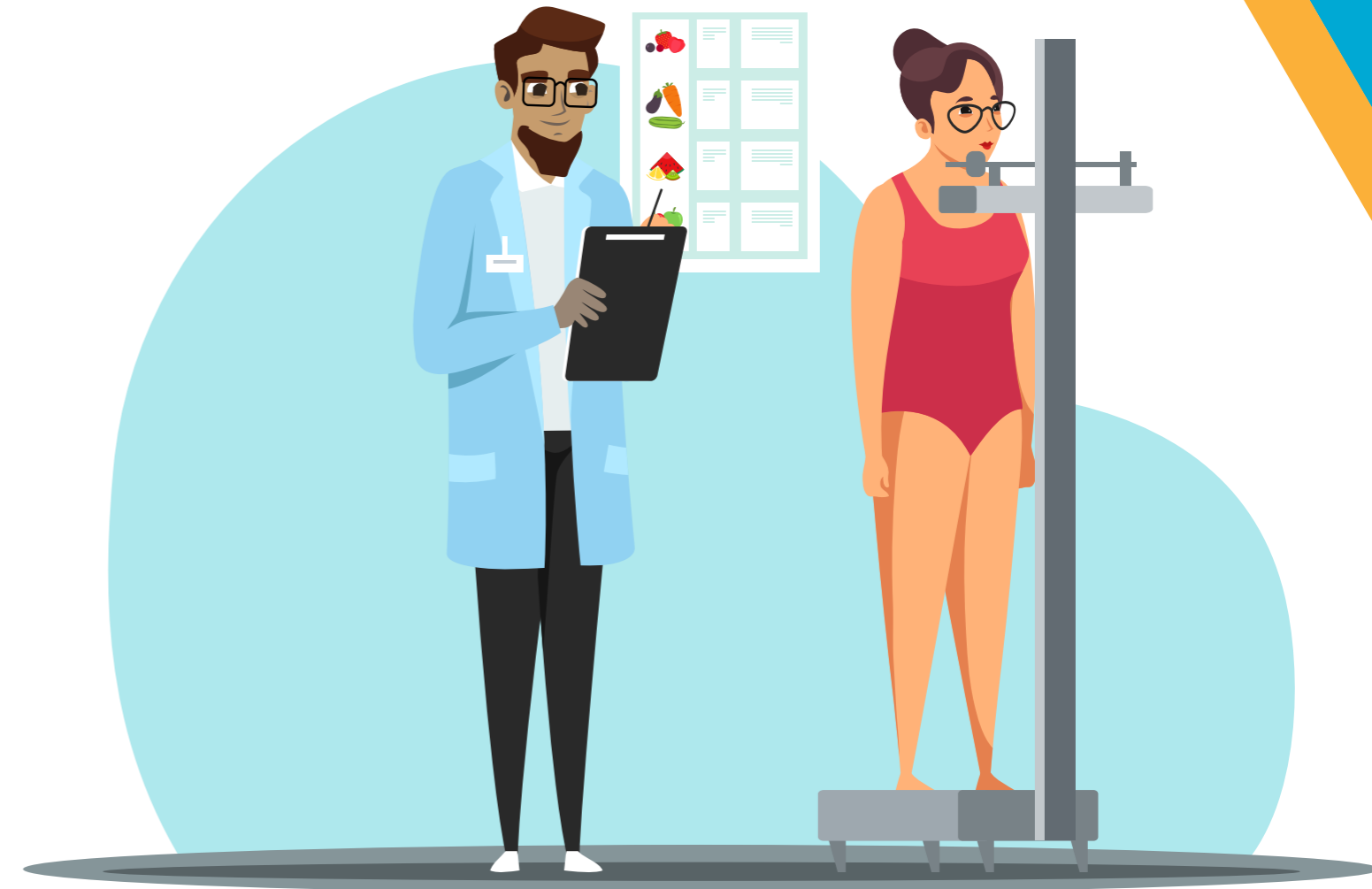
Vaping can irritate the lungs and affect how you recover from anaesthesia.

Reduce alcohol intake.

Cutting back alcohol before surgery improves liver function and reduces anaesthetic risks.

Avoid recreational drugs for at least 24 hours before surgery.

It is important to tell your anaesthesiologist if you use any recreational substances. Some recreational drugs can affect your anaesthetic. This information will be confidential and will help your anaesthesiologist plan your anaesthetic safely.



Look after your general health:

Eat healthily, get enough rest, and exercise when possible

Staying well nourished, fit, and rested supports recovery and reduces complications.

Manage your long term conditions

Control of blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, or other ongoing illnesses decreases risk during anaesthesia.

Look after your mental wellbeing

Reducing stress and discussing worries with your healthcare team or GP can make the experience easier and safer.

Follow fasting and pre operative instructions

Your anaesthesiologist will tell you when to stop eating and drinking before your operation.

Following these fasting guidelines is essential for your safety under anaesthesia, as food or fluid in the stomach can cause serious complications.

Ask questions and stay informed

Write down any questions or concerns and bring them to your appointments. Your anaesthesiologist will explain what to expect and how to prepare safely.

For further information please refer to our section on preparing for your surgery

What is a pre-operative assessment clinic (PAC)?

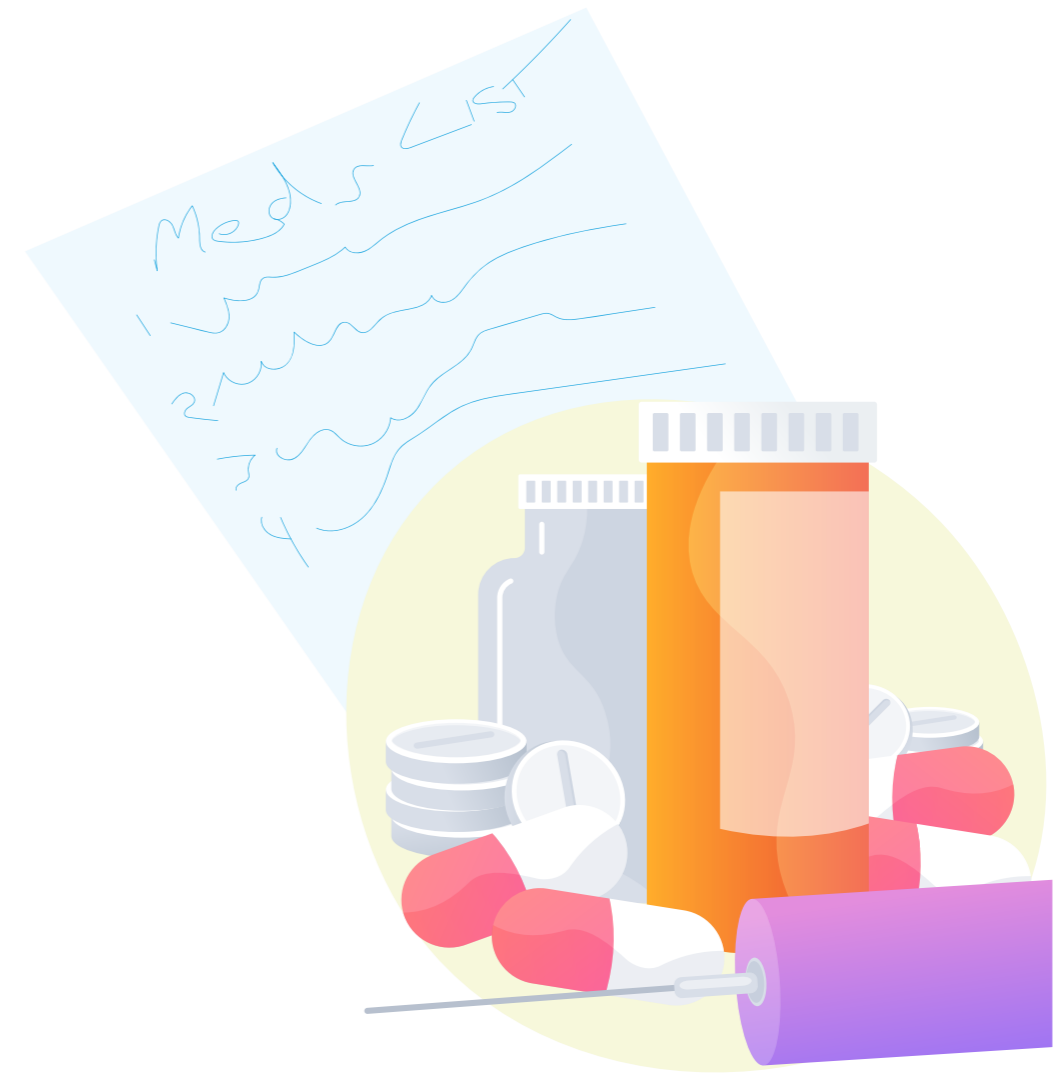
The preoperative clinic is an outpatient clinic which aims to assess your general health and fitness prior to your surgery. Your assessment may take place in person at an outpatient clinic, or virtually by telephone or video call. If your surgery needs to happen urgently, this assessment may be carried out on the ward.

For further information please refer to our section on preparing for your surgery

Why do I need to go to the pre-operative assessment clinic (PAC)?

It is important to attend the pre-operative clinic to ensure that you are fully prepared for your procedure, to answer any questions you may have, and to help prevent any unexpected issues or delays on the day of your surgery.

For further information please refer to our section on preparing for your surgery



Do I need to bring anything to the pre-operative assessment clinic PAC?

Please bring your appointment letter and an up-to-date list of all your medications with you (including all prescribed, over the counter, and herbal medicines or supplements).

If you or anyone in your family has had a problem with an anaesthetic in the past, please bring any information or documentation you have about this with you.

If you have any specific questions you would like to ask, it is useful to make a note of these and bring them along to your appointment so you can discuss them in further detail.

Please refer to the section on 'suggested questions to ask the anaesthesiologist'.

For further information please refer to our section on preparing for your surgery

Do I need to fast for my pre-operative assessment clinic (PAC) appointment?

You do not need to fast for your appointment, please take your medications as you would normally on the day of your appointment.

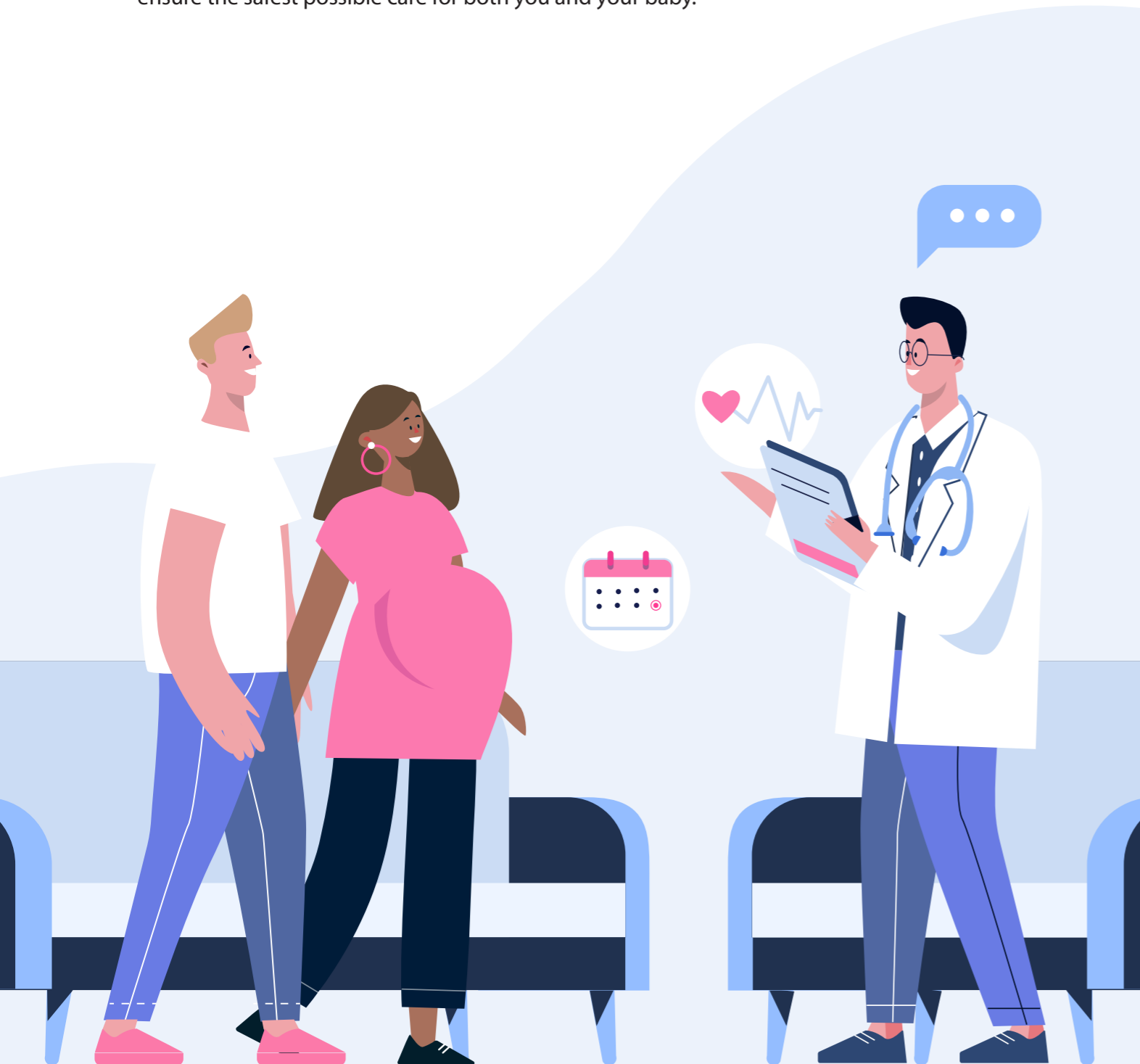
For further information please refer to our section on preparing for your surgery

I'm pregnant; do I need to let my anaesthesiologist know?

Yes, it is very important to tell your anaesthesiologist if you are pregnant or think you might be before having any operation or anaesthetic. All women of childbearing age will usually have a pregnancy test before surgery.

This information will help your team provide the safest and most appropriate care for you and your baby. Your team will discuss the risks and benefits of having surgery with you. If the procedure is not urgent, your team may recommend delaying surgery.

Being pregnant should not delay you having emergency surgery. Anaesthesiologists are specially trained to look after pregnant patients and will carefully plan your anaesthetic to ensure the safest possible care for both you and your baby.



Why am I asked the same questions repeatedly?

Throughout your journey from the ward, to the operating theatre, you will notice that staff may ask you the same questions several times.

This includes confirming your:

- Name and date of birth
- Type of operation
- Side or site of surgery (for example, left or right side)

These checks are part of an international safety process (World Health Organisation Surgical Safety Checklist) designed to improve the safety of patients by making sure the correct patient has the correct procedure, on the correct site, at the correct time.

Why do I need to fast before a general anaesthetic?

Before you have a general anaesthetic, it's very important that your stomach is empty.

The medications used for general anaesthesia relax all the muscles in your body, including those in your stomach and oesophagus (the food pipe).

If your stomach still contains food or drink, there's a small chance that you could vomit and that some of that material could enter your lungs. This is known as an aspiration, and if it occurs, it can cause a serious chest infection (pneumonia).

Fasting helps prevent this risk and makes your anaesthetic much safer.

For further information please refer to our section on general anaesthesia.



What is a general anaesthetic?

General anaesthesia is a process where an anaesthiologist gives you medications through a drip or in a gas through a facemask. These medications cause you to go into a deep sleep. This causes you not to feel pain or be aware or awake during your surgery.

For further information please refer to our section on general anaesthesia.



How will you make sure I am 'asleep'?

While a general anaesthetic can be compared to a deep sleep it is very different from a natural sleep where you can be woken up. You cannot be woken from a general anaesthetic until the medications are stopped and their effects wear off. While you are unconscious, your anaesthiologist stays with you and continuously monitors you to keep you safe.

Could I accidentally "wake up" during surgery?

"Waking up" during an operation under general anaesthetic is called 'accidental awareness'. It is a very rare side effect of general anaesthesia. In the very rare event that it does occur, it varies from hearing sounds, feeling pressure or pain, or being unable to move.

To minimise this occurrence, your anaesthiologist will stay with you throughout the operation, carefully monitoring you and adjusting your anaesthetic to keep you safe and fully unconscious.

Some patients report remembering dreams they had during surgery or the feeling of their breathing tube as they wake up, this is not 'accidental awareness'.

It is important that if you feel this has happened to you, to contact your healthcare team or anaesthiologist as soon as possible.

For further information please refer to our section on general anaesthesia.

What is the difference between general anaesthesia and sedation?

For some procedures, (e.g. colonoscopy) sedation rather than a general anaesthetic is used. Sedation is not the same as general anaesthesia.

During sedation a patient receives medication to ensure they are comfortable, sleepy and relaxed but remain conscious throughout the procedure. This is different to general anaesthesia where the patient is unresponsive and unconscious during the procedure.



Will I have pain after my operation?

Some discomfort or pain should be expected after your operation. Your healthcare team will monitor your pain and provide medication to keep you as comfortable as possible. It is important to let your nurse or doctor know if you are experiencing pain and to ask for pain relief when you need it.

Do I need someone to take me home after a general anaesthetic?

Yes, you will need someone to take you home after having a general anaesthetic, even if you feel fine. After having anaesthesia, you may still feel drowsy, dizzy, or less alert for several hours, even if you think you have fully recovered.

Why you need someone with you:

- Anaesthetic and pain relief medicines can slow your reactions and affect your judgment.
- It is not safe to drive, cycle, take public transport alone, or operate machinery for at least 24 hours after an anaesthetic.
- Having a friend, family member, or carer with you ensures you get home safely and have help if you feel unwell.

You will need to:

- Arrange for a responsible adult to collect you from the hospital or day surgery unit.
- Make sure someone stays with you for the first 24 hours after your procedure.
- Avoid signing legal documents or making important decisions during this time, as your judgment may still be affected.

If no one is available to take you home, let your healthcare team know in advance, they can help you arrange alternative transport or plan your discharge safely.

For further information please refer to our section on general anaesthesia.



Some questions you might wish to ask your anaesthesiologist

- Is there anything I can do to help my operation go well?
- Are there any specific risks for me having an anaesthetic?
- How long do I need to fast before the operation?
- Can I take my medications before my operation?
- What should I do if my medications are changed before my operation?
- I am very nervous about my operation, is there anything that can be done to help with this?
- I have diabetes, how will I manage my blood sugar when I'm fasting and after the operation?
- What should I do with my hearing aids, glasses or false teeth?
- What should I do with my piercings?





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