

General anaesthesia information



What is anaesthesia?

The term anaesthesia means a loss of sensation. There are different kinds of anaesthesia. A local anaesthetic numbs a small area of the body, such as a finger or the area around a tooth. A general anaesthetic involves the use of strong medicines that cause unconsciousness. These medicines affect important body functions, including the heart, lungs, and circulation. For this reason, general anaesthesia is always given under the careful supervision of an anaesthesiologist, who is a doctor specially trained to provide safe and effective care. There are a number of other types of anaesthesia that can be used to facilitate safe surgery and to provide pain relief including local anaesthesia, regional anaesthesia and neuraxial anaesthesia (epidural and spinal).

This leaflet is going to focus on general anaesthesia and what to expect in if you need to have a general anaesthetic. Other types of anaesthesia such as local anaesthesia, regional anaesthesia and neuraxial anaesthesia (epidural and spinal) are covered elsewhere on the website in detail.

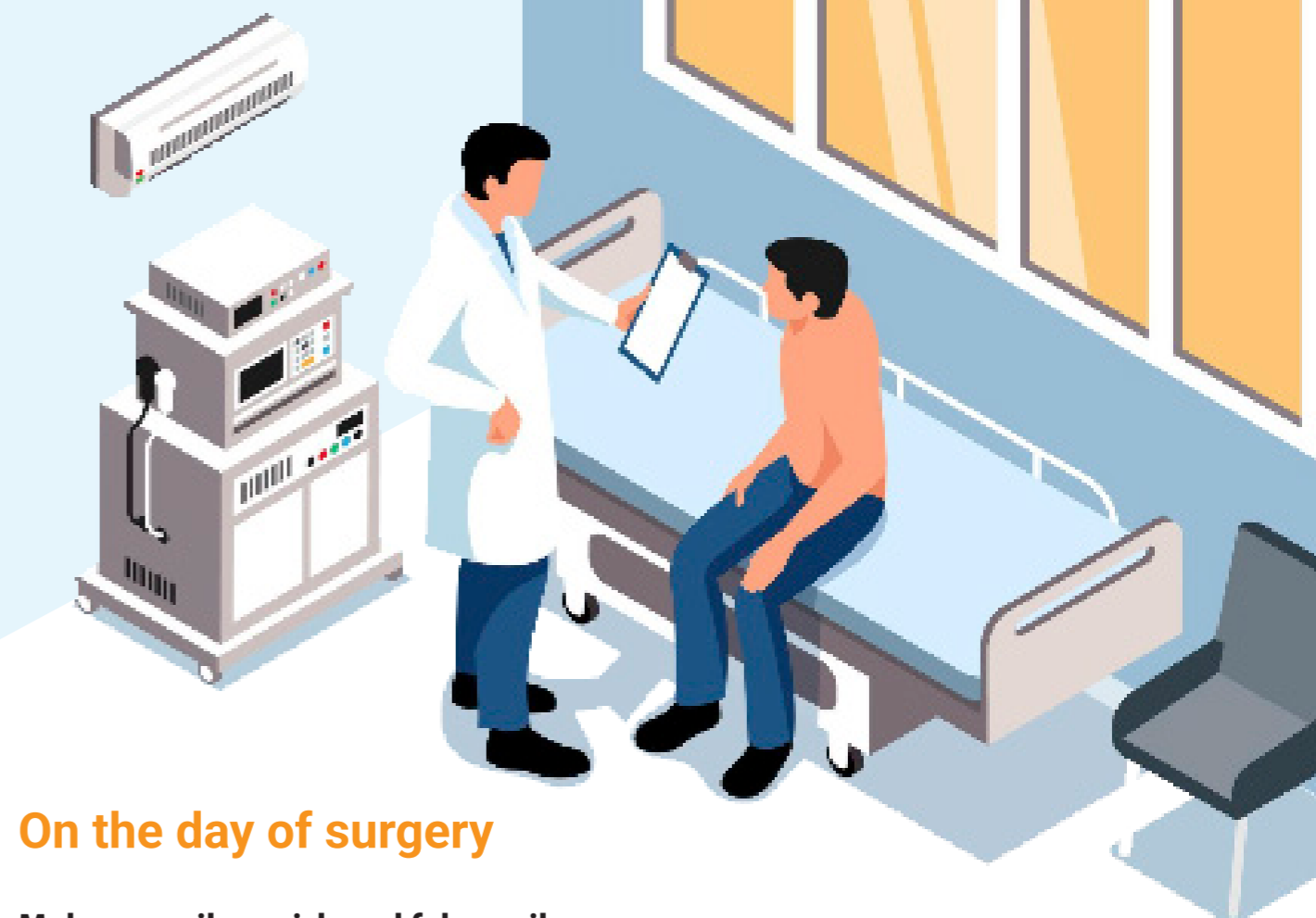
What is a general anaesthetic?

General anaesthesia is a process where an anaesthesiologist (anaesthetic doctor) gives you medications through a drip or in a gas form 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.

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 anaesthesiologist stays with you all the time to keep you safe.

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.



On the day of surgery

Makeup, nail varnish and false nails

Ideally avoid putting on makeup and body lotion the morning of your surgery as they can stop monitoring equipment working correctly. If possible, its best to have no nail varnish or false nails as this can disrupt the monitoring of oxygen levels in your blood.

Jewellery

It is recommended to remove all jewellery. A plain wedding band can usually be worn but will be taped over if left on. It is important to remove any piercings, particularly around the lips and tongue before a general anaesthetic to prevent difficulties or injury from the equipment used to look after your airway and breathing.

Fasting guidelines

The hospital will give you clear fasting instructions on your admission letter or in the pre-assessment clinic, please follow these carefully. Food or drink in your stomach during anaesthesia could cause complications, so fasting correctly helps keep you safe. As a rule, you fast for solid food for 6 hours and can have clear fluids up to 2 hours before your surgery. Some hospitals follow a "Sip Til Send" policy, where you will be allowed to have sips of water until you are brought to the operating theatre. Please check your local hospitals practice on this.

Medication instructions

Continue your usual medications unless instructed otherwise by your anaesthesiologist or surgeon. Specific instructions will be given if you take medicines like blood thinners (such as warfarin, apixaban, clopidogrel), blood pressure medications and diabetes medications. If you feel unwell on your surgery day, please call the number provided on your admissions letter.

Meeting your anaesthesiologist

On the day of your surgery, your anaesthesiologist will meet you. During this meeting they will review the notes from your pre-assessment clinic and discuss any changes that have happened since the clinic.

This meeting might be your first pre-assessment depending on the urgency of the surgery and your health.

During this review they will discuss:

- Your health and medical history.
- Your anaesthetic options and explain their benefits and risks.
- Consider your preferences and discuss the best choice for you.

Your consent and comfort are very important; nothing will happen without your understanding and agreement.

You can refuse any treatment if you choose.

When it's time for your operation

You will be asked to put on a hospital gown and compression stockings (TEDS) to help prevent clots. A staff member will take you to the operating theatre. In theatre staff will do final safety checks, including confirming your identity and the details of your operation.

Monitors will be applied:

- a probe on your finger to monitor your oxygen level (saturation probe)
- sticky dots applied to your chest to monitor your heart rate and rhythm (ECG lead)
- a cuff that will tighten around your arm to measure your blood pressure (blood pressure cuff)



Administering the Anaesthetic

The anaesthesiologist usually administers the anaesthetic through an intravenous (IV) drip placed in your arm. They can also administer the anaesthetic gas through a facemask, but this is less common for adults.

While you are going off to sleep, you will have a tight-fitting plastic facemask placed over your mouth and nose. This facemask has oxygen coming through it for you to breathe in and out. This allows you fill up your lungs with extra oxygen before you go to "sleep". You will 'fall asleep' shortly after the anaesthetic is given.

When you are under anaesthetic (asleep), a tube will be placed in your airway to protect your lungs during the operation. This tube will be connected to a machine called a ventilator to assist your breathing. They may place some more drips in your hand, arm, neck or leg depending on the type of surgery you are having. If any of these extra drips are needed, they will explain this to you before you go to sleep.

You will be positioned in the correct place for the surgery on the operating table. You are now ready for surgery to take place.

During surgery

An Anaesthesiologist will be with you the entire time that you are asleep. They will monitor your vital signs — oxygen level, heart rate, blood pressure. They will adjust and give medications based on these changes. You will be kept asleep and given medications for pain relief, to prevent nausea after surgery and often antibiotics to prevent infection. You will also receive fluids to help keep you hydrated.

After the surgery

When the surgery is over, the anaesthetic will be turned off, and you will be woken up. You will be brought to the recovery room. Here we allow the effects of the anaesthetic to wear off, and check if you need any more medications for pain relief or nausea. The effects of general anaesthesia vary from person to person, type of anaesthetic used, the surgery you have and duration of the surgery.

Risks and Side Effects

While general anaesthesia is very safe for most patients, it's important to understand the possible side effects and risks. Your anaesthesiologist is a specialist medical doctor trained to manage these risks and will take every precaution to keep you safe.

When thinking about risk, it is helpful to consider:

- The risks of having the surgery
- The risks of not having the surgery
- Any alternative treatments and their risks

What affects your personal risk?

Your individual risk depends on several factors, including

- Your existing medical conditions
- The type of surgery you are having
- How long the surgery is expected to last
- Whether the surgery is planned or an emergency
- How likely a complication is to happen
- How serious the problem would be if it occurred
- What treatment is available if a problem happens
- Your weight
- Whether you smoke

Your healthcare team will consider all these factors carefully when planning your care.



After your general anaesthetic

Depending on the surgery and your general health you might be able to go home the same day as your general anaesthetic.

If you're going home on the same day:

- You must have someone to collect you and stay with you overnight
- You must not drive, drink alcohol, make important decisions or use heavy machinery for 24 hours.
- You may feel tired for a day or two, so take it easy and rest.
- Follow the instructions given to you about wound care, pain relief, and any follow-up appointments.

If you have any unexpected problems at home; like increasing pain, bleeding, fever, or confusion attend your nearest emergency department.





College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland

CAI
SALUS DUM VIGILAMUS

www.anaesthesia.ie

College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland
22 Merrion Square North
Dublin D02 X236, Ireland
Phone: +353 1 265 0600
Email: info@coa.ie