

General Anaesthesia

What is general anaesthesia

General anaesthesia is a medically induced coma and loss of protective reflexes resulting from the administration of one or more general anaesthetic agents. A variety of medications may be administered, with the overall aim of ensuring sleep, amnesia, analgesia, relaxation of skeletal muscles and loss of control of reflexes of the automatic nervous system. The optimal combination of these agents for any given patient and procedure is typically selected by an anaesthesiologist.

How to prepare for general anaesthesia

General anaesthesia relaxes the muscles in your digestive tract and airway that keeps food and acid in your stomach. That is why it is important to follow your doctor's instructions about when to stop eating and drinking prior to surgery. In most cases you should start fasting about six hours before your procedure.

Discuss your medications with your doctor who may tell you to take certain medications with a small sip of water during your fasting time.

You may need to avoid some medications such as aspirin and some over-the-counter blood thinners for at least a week before your procedure, as these can cause surgical complications.

If you have diabetes talk with your doctor about altering your diabetes medication during the fasting period.



General Anaesthesia cont

What can you expect?

Before you undergo general anaesthesia the nursing personnel and/or anaesthesiologist will talk with you and may ask questions about:

- your health history;
- your medication usage;
- allergies and
- your past experiences with anaesthesia.

In most cases the anaesthesiologist delivers the anaesthesia medications through an intravenous line in your arm but sometimes the anaesthesia may be given as a gas that you breathe from a mask.

Once you are asleep a tube may be inserted into your mouth and down your windpipe to ensure you get sufficient oxygen and to protect your lungs from blood and bodily secretions, such as from your stomach. You will be given a muscle relaxant before the doctor inserts the tube to relax the muscles in your windpipe. Your vital signs such as pulse rate, blood pressure etc. are continuously monitored via a monitor attached to the anaesthetic machine.

When the procedure is complete, the anaesthesia medications are stopped and you will gradually awaken either in the operating or recovery room. You may feel a little groggy and confused initially and may experience some common side effects such as nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, sore throat, shivering, sleepiness and mild hoarseness. You may also experience some pain but the doctor may prescribe pain medication after the procedure which will be administered by him/herself or the nursing personnel.

Reference/s: **Mayo Clinic staff**, 2013. *How you prepare for general anaesthesia*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/anaesthesia/MY00100/DSECTION=how-you-prepare> [Accessed 25 February 2013].

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