

# Your child's general anaesthetic for dental treatment

Information for parents  
and guardians  
of children



This booklet explains what to expect when your child has a general anaesthetic for dental treatment. It has been written by patients, patient representatives and anaesthetists, working in partnership.

You can find more information in other leaflets in the series on the website [www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo). They may also be available from the anaesthetic department in your hospital.

The series includes the following:

- Anaesthesia explained (a more detailed booklet)
- You and your anaesthetic (a shorter summary)
- **Your child's general anaesthetic**
- Your spinal anaesthetic
- Epidurals for pain relief after surgery
- Headache after an epidural or spinal anaesthetic
- Local anaesthesia for your eye operation
- Your tonsillectomy as day surgery
- Your anaesthetic for aortic surgery
- Anaesthetic choices for hip or knee replacement

### Risks associated with your anaesthetic

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A collection of 14 articles about specific risks associated with having an anaesthetic has been developed to supplement the patient information leaflets. The risk articles are available on the website [www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo).

Throughout this booklet we use these symbols:



To highlight your options or choices



To highlight where you may want to take action



To point you to more information

## Introduction

Dental treatment involving fillings and simple tooth removal can often be carried out using injections to numb the child's mouth. It is also possible to add sedation which makes the child feel drowsy, and helps to relax children who are anxious or afraid.

For some children however, especially the very young, a general anaesthetic may be the only option.

You may have some concerns and questions about general anaesthesia and this leaflet is designed to help you.

If you would like further information then please ask your dentist or the nurses and anaesthetists at your hospital. They will be happy to help.

### What is a general anaesthetic?

- **General anaesthesia** is a state of controlled unconsciousness and freedom from pain.
- **Anaesthetics** are the drugs (gases and injections) that are used to start and maintain anaesthesia.

When the operation is finished the anaesthetic is stopped and your child regains consciousness ('wakes up').

### Who gives the anaesthetic?

General anaesthetics are given by anaesthetists. They are doctors with specialist training and are experts at looking after patients when they are anaesthetised. The anaesthetist stays with your child all the time during the operation and carefully monitors him or her.

## Before the anaesthetic



### What should I tell my child about the anaesthetic?

This will depend on the age of your child and how much you judge they can understand. We have found that children as young as five may have fears about going to sleep for an operation and about feeling pain afterwards

It may be enough to explain that some of their teeth are poorly and need to be removed. You can explain that the doctor will give them some medicine which will make them go to sleep while their teeth are removed. The doctor will look after them while they are asleep and will help them wake up at the end of the operation. They will also be given medicine to make sure they don't feel too sore afterwards. Older children may want to know more. Do encourage your child to talk about the operation. Books, games and stories can help. Many hospitals have play staff who can give explanations and encourage discussion through play.



You may be able to visit the department/operating theatre before the procedure and speak to the staff.

### What should I do if my child is unwell?

If your child has a cough, cold or a running nose or is otherwise unwell it may not be possible to go ahead with the anaesthetic and operation.



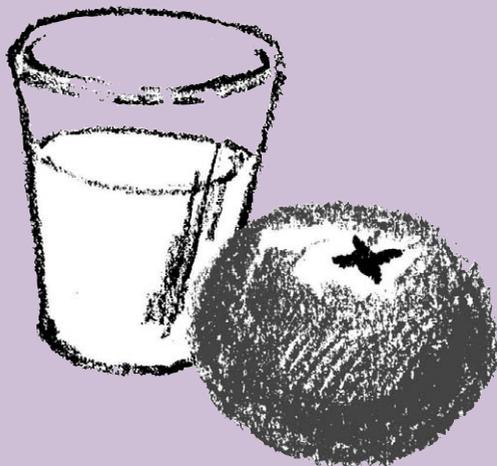
If you have any doubts please contact the hospital for advice before attending for the appointment.

## Why is it important for my child not to eat or drink before the anaesthetic? ('nil by mouth')

If there is food or liquid in your child's stomach during the anaesthetic, it could come up into the back of the throat and then go into his or her lungs. This would cause choking, or serious damage to the lungs, and so is very dangerous. Your local hospital will give instructions about when your child must stop eating and drinking.



Please do not let your child have sweets or chewing gum as these fill the stomach with saliva and increase the risk of vomiting.



## The anaesthetic

### How will my child be given the anaesthetic?

Your child can either have:

- anaesthetic gas to breathe through a face-mask, or a small mask placed over the nose.
- an injection through a cannula. (A cannula is a thin plastic tube placed, using a needle, into a vein on the back of the hand or the arm. Once the cannula is in place, the needle is removed).



**Anaesthetic cream** is commonly placed on a child's hand or arm to make the skin numb and reduce the pain when a cannula is put in.

The cream takes up to an hour to work, so please make sure it is not removed.



## Can I choose how the anaesthetic is given?

The final decision is usually made by the anaesthetist, after discussing the options with you and your child. Nothing will happen unless you understand and agree with what has been planned.



If your child has had an anaesthetic before and would like to 'go to sleep' in the same way, or alternatively, has had an unpleasant experience, **please tell the anaesthetist.**

## Can I stay with my child while the anaesthetic is given?

We encourage a parent, adult relative or guardian to stay with the child. Your child will usually become unconscious on the operating table or trolley in the anaesthetic room. If your child is unhappy to leave you, it is usually possible to start the anaesthetic with your child on your lap and then transfer him or her to the operating table when unconscious.

Once your child is unconscious you will be asked to return to the waiting room. The anaesthetist will stay with your child throughout the operation.

## How long will my child be unconscious for?

This will depend on the length of the operation.

- Simple removal of teeth may only take **one or two minutes.**
- Recovery will occur quickly, usually within about **five minutes.**

If the operation takes longer then your child will receive more anaesthetic and recovery will take a little longer.

However, your child will usually be conscious within **fifteen minutes** of the end of the operation.

## Will pain relief medicine be given?

Yes, most children receive one or more of:

- a pain relief medicine to swallow beforehand
- a pain relief suppository during the operation
- a pain relief medicine injected into their cannula
- local anaesthetic injected by the dentist near to the teeth being treated. This is done while your child is anaesthetised.

Your dentist or anaesthetist will tell you more about what is planned for your child. If they still feel pain when they wake up, more pain relief will be available.

## Can I be there when my child regains consciousness?

Once the operation is completed your child will be taken to the recovery room. A trained recovery nurse will look after your child and once he or she is responding to the nurse's voice you will be able to be with your child again.

## What will my child feel like?

When your child first wakes up he or she is likely to be a bit confused and may cry for a short time. Some children are upset by the taste of blood in their mouth. If local anaesthetic has been given, they may not like the numb feeling in their mouth. They may also feel some pain, in which case more pain relief medicine will be given. Most children settle quickly and can soon have a drink.

# Afterwards

## How soon will I be able to take my child home?

After very short operations children can usually go home after one hour. For longer operations recovery will take longer but most children will be able to go home within two hours.

## Will my child have any after-effects?

It is common for children to:

- feel dizzy and a bit sick for a few hours
- be sick occasionally, especially if they have swallowed a little blood
- have some pain or discomfort for a few hours.



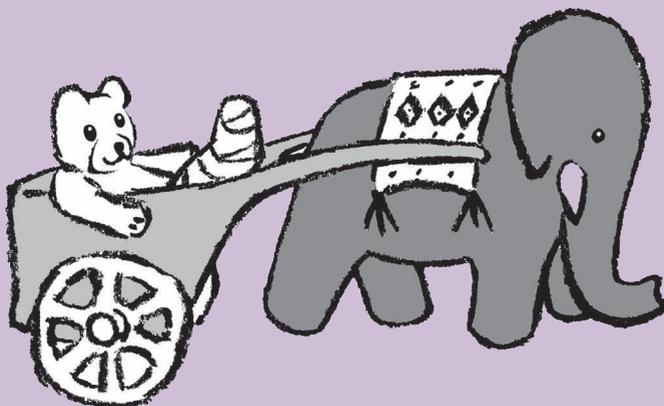
You can help by giving your child pain relieving medicine regularly as prescribed rather than waiting for him or her to complain.

If you have any concerns about your child when you get home, you should contact the hospital using the telephone number provided.

## Should I keep my child away from school?

You will have to be guided by how your child feels. Some children still don't feel quite right the following day and may need to stay off school.

Your dentist will advise you about when your child can safely take part in vigorous exercise or sports.



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## Risk and safety

### **Why does my child have to go to hospital to have a general anaesthetic?**

Government regulations state that general anaesthesia for dental treatment may only be given in hospital where all the appropriate safety facilities are available. General anaesthetics cannot be given at your dentist's surgery.

### **How safe is general anaesthesia for dental treatment and what are the risks?**

With modern anaesthesia, serious problems are uncommon. Risk cannot be removed completely but when a patient is fit and healthy and the operation is a small one, as many dental operations are, the risk of a life-threatening problem is about 1 in 400,000. This risk is considerably less than that of your child being seriously injured in a road accident.

## **My child has learning disabilities or has special medical problems. Are there any extra risks with the anaesthetic?**

Yes, there may be a small increase in risk but this risk should be outweighed by the benefits of your child's treatment. Each child is different and will be carefully assessed before their operation so that their treatment can be tailored to their needs.

Sometimes children with serious medical problems who need a general anaesthetic for their dental treatment need to be admitted to hospital rather than go home the same day. This allows full preparation for their operation and the anaesthetic and a longer recovery period afterwards.

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## Useful organisations

### The Royal College of Anaesthetists

Churchill House  
35 Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4SG  
Tel: 020 7092 1500

website: [www.rcoa.ac.uk](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk)  
email: [info@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:info@rcoa.ac.uk)  
Fax: 020 7092 1730

This organisation is responsible for standards in anaesthesia, critical care and pain management throughout the UK.

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### The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland

21 Portland Place  
London W1B 1PY  
Tel: 020 7631 1650

website: [www.aagbi.org](http://www.aagbi.org)  
email: [info@aagbi.org](mailto:info@aagbi.org)  
Fax: 020 7631 4352

This organisation works to promote the development of anaesthesia and the welfare of anaesthetists and their patients in Great Britain and Ireland.

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### The British Dental Association

64 Wimpole Street  
London W1G 8BYS  
Tel: 020 7935 0875

website: [www.bda-dentistry.org.uk](http://www.bda-dentistry.org.uk)  
email: [enquiries@bda.org](mailto:enquiries@bda.org)  
Fax: 020 7487 5232

A national professional association for dentists.

### **The Society for the Advancement of Anaesthesia in Dentistry**

21 Portland Place  
London W1B 1PY  
Tel: 020 7631 8893

website: [www.saad.org.uk](http://www.saad.org.uk)  
email: [saad@aagbi.org](mailto:saad@aagbi.org)  
Fax: 01246 208729

This society promotes and encourages the study and extends the practice of improved methods of administration of anaesthesia, sedation and all forms of anxiety and pain control in dentistry.

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### **The Association of Dental Anaesthetists**

21 Portland Place  
London W1B 1PY  
Tel: 020 7631 8898

web: [www.dentalanaesthesia.org.uk](http://www.dentalanaesthesia.org.uk)  
email: [info@dentalanaesthesia.org.uk](mailto:info@dentalanaesthesia.org.uk)  
Fax: 020 7631 4352

This organisation promotes the science of anaesthesia and sedation for dentistry and provides a forum for discussion. Membership is open to medical and dental practitioners approved by Council.

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**The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (AAGBI)**

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## Questions you may like to ask your anaesthetist

**Q Who will give my child's anaesthetic?**

**Q Is this the only type of anaesthetic possible for dental treatment?**

**Q Have you often used this type of anaesthetic?**

**Q What are the risks of this type of anaesthetic?**

**Q Does my child have any special risks?**

**Q How will my child feel afterwards?**

## Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this booklet.

You should send these to:

The Patient Information Unit  
Churchill House  
35 Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4SG  
email: [standards@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:standards@rcoa.ac.uk)

Edition date: May 2008

This leaflet will be reviewed within five years of the date of publication



The Royal College of Anaesthetists



The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland