



# YOUR GUIDE TO A GENERAL ANAESTHETIC

DEPARTMENT OF ANAESTHESIOLOGY  
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## WHY WOULD YOU NEED A GENERAL ANAESTHETIC?

Your doctor may tell you that you need to undergo a procedure or a surgery that requires a general anaesthetic.

## WHAT IS A GENERAL ANAESTHETIC?

A general anaesthetic is a form of anaesthesia that causes you to lose consciousness even before the surgery or procedure begins. This is to ensure that you are kept pain-free and unaware of what is happening as the procedure is being carried out.

A general anaesthetic is done by injecting medications into your bloodstream and/or giving you an anaesthetic gas for you to breathe in which will then cause you to fall asleep. Once you are fully unconscious, a breathing tube will be inserted into your throat or nose to allow a machine to support your breathing and to ensure continuous administration of the anaesthetic gas.

**An anaesthetist will always be present and with you from the beginning of anaesthesia until the end of surgery. The anaesthetist will ensure that the best care is given and that you are kept safe.**

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING A GENERAL ANAESTHETIC?

- Facilitates complete control of airway, breathing and circulation.
- Allows muscle relaxation for prolonged periods of time to facilitate surgery.
- Reduces intraoperative patient awareness, recall and pain.
- Appropriate in cases where local anaesthesia would not be adequate.
- Can be administered rapidly and is reversible.

## WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF A GENERAL ANAESTHETIC?

Not everyone will experience the side effects, and most of the side effects are short-term and tend to occur immediately after anaesthesia.

The side effects include:

- Brief confusion and memory loss (usually in the elderly)
- Dizziness, headache
- Bruising or soreness from IV drip
- Some nausea & vomiting
- Feeling cold and shivering
- Temporary muscle pains
- Sore throat (due to the breathing tube)

If any of these side effects are bad enough to make you feel very uncomfortable, there are measures and medications that the anaesthetist can give to you to make it better.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS OF GENERAL ANAESTHETIC YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT?

**Usually, general anaesthesia is very safe.**

Anyone, even very ill patients can be anaesthetised. Certain measures can be taken to reduce the risks or improve the patient's condition to circumvent certain complications.

Generally, the very young or the very old or even those planned for lengthy procedures are at most risk of problems.

These problems can include postoperative confusion, heart attack, chest infections, or even stroke.

Some numbers to help you understand

Very common	Common	Uncommon	Rare	Very rare
1 in 10	1 in 100	1 in 1000	1 in 10,000	1 in 100,000

**Rarely**, the following may occur:

1. You may be aware of what is happening around you even under general anaesthesia (more common in certain surgeries or emergency surgeries).
2. Damage to eyes that may be painful and require treatment.
3. Injury to the teeth, gums, lips and tongue.

The following are **very rare** complications but could still occur especially in patients who are deemed high risk:

1. Airway narrowing causing difficulty to breathe.
2. Allergic reaction to a medication which may lead to breathing difficulties and circulatory problems.
3. A life-threatening condition known as "Malignant Hyperthermia" which occurs in certain individuals. This causes muscle spasm, increased blood pressure and heart rate, and increased temperature.
4. Heart attack, stroke or lung infection may occur in patients who have a pre-existing lung or heart disease as well as active smokers.

DISCLAIMER : This information sheet is meant to provide basic information regarding general anaesthesia, and your anaesthetist will discuss with you further if there are any concerns specific to your condition and surgery.