

General Anaesthetic (child)

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is a general anaesthetic?

A general anaesthetic is a combination of drugs that produce deep sleep. It is used for operations or procedures as it causes a loss of sensation. Your child will not be aware of what is happening and afterwards will not remember anything that has happened.

What are the benefits of a general anaesthetic?

Your child needs to have an operation or procedure. So that your surgeon or doctor can perform the operation safely, your child needs to be in a state where they do not move and their muscles are relaxed. A safe way to achieve this is to give your child a general anaesthetic.

Are there any alternatives to a general anaesthetic?

For certain procedures, such as a scan, your child may be able to have sedation. This can be given in a variety of ways such as a syrup or nose spray.

For smaller operations, your anaesthetist may consider a local anaesthetic injected near the area of surgery.

The options depend on how mature your child is and their ability to stay calm and still.

How is a general anaesthetic given?

Most older children are sent to sleep by injecting the anaesthetic through a drip (small tube) in a vein. The injection takes about 30 seconds to work.

Some children prefer to go to sleep by breathing an anaesthetic gas through a face mask. This technique is more common in younger children and babies. Your child may be a bit restless as the gas begins to work but it usually takes only a minute for them to go to sleep.

When the operation has finished, the anaesthetic wears off, allowing your child to wake up again.

What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death, but this is rare.

Minor complications (not disabling or life-threatening)

- Feeling or being sick after the operation
- Sore throat
- Behavioural changes
- Dental damage
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication

Serious complications

- Nerve injury
- Slow or irregular heartbeat
- Cardiac arrest (where the heart stops working)
- Breathing problems
- Allergic reaction

Summary

A general anaesthetic is usually a safe and effective way for your child to have an operation or procedure.

Most children do not have any problems.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

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Acknowledgements

Reviewer

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