

# Anaesthetics (Overview)

A11 Lite - Expires end of January 2024



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.

© EIDO Systems International Limited. The operation and treatment information in this document is published under license from EIDO Systems International and is protected by copyright laws. Other than for your personal, non-commercial use, you may not copy, print out, download or otherwise reproduce any of the information.

[eidohealthcare.com](http://eidohealthcare.com)



## What is an anaesthetic?

An anaesthetic is a combination of drugs that causes loss of sensation.

- General anaesthetic – A combination of drugs that produce deep sleep. You will not be aware of what is happening and afterwards you will not remember anything that has happened.
- Epidural or spinal anaesthetic – Involves injecting local anaesthetics and other painkillers near your spinal cord to give pain relief in certain areas of your body.
- Local anaesthetic – Temporarily stops nerves working so that you do not feel pain. The anaesthetic can be injected just around the area where the operation is going to take place. It is possible to numb the nerves to your arm or leg (a nerve block).

## What are the benefits of an anaesthetic?

- You may need to have an operation or procedure – So that your surgeon or doctor can perform the operation safely, you need to be in a state where you do not move and your muscles are relaxed. A safe way to achieve this is to give you an anaesthetic.
- You may be in pain because you have had surgery or have a particular condition – Anaesthetics, usually given by an epidural, can give you pain relief and keep you comfortable.

## How is a general anaesthetic given?

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

For some people it may be more appropriate to go to sleep by breathing an anaesthetic gas through a face mask. This also takes about 30 seconds to work.

## How is an epidural or spinal anaesthetic given?

An epidural works by temporarily numbing your nerves to give pain relief. A fine catheter (tube) is inserted in the epidural space, near your spinal cord.

Local anaesthetics and other painkillers are injected down the catheter into the epidural space to numb your nerves.

The technique for a spinal is similar but usually involves only one injection into the subarachnoid space (bag of fluid that surrounds your spinal cord).

## How is a local anaesthetic given?

The simplest form of local anaesthesia is to inject the anaesthetic just around the area where the operation is going to take place.

For a nerve block, local anaesthetics and other painkillers are injected near the major nerves to the part of your body to be operated on.

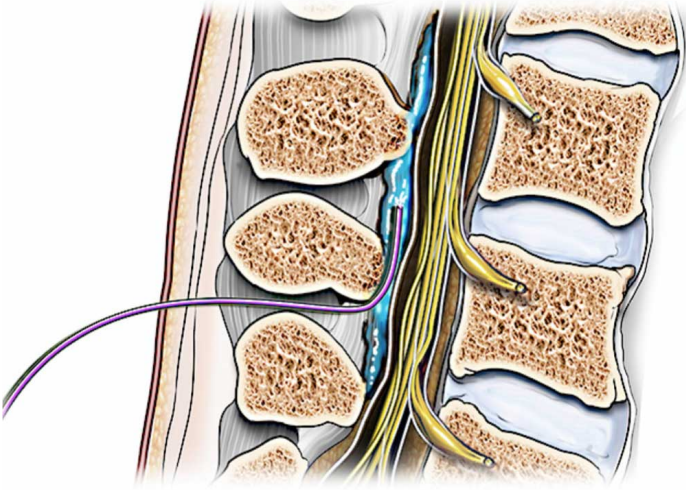
## What complications can happen?

Some of these can be serious and can even cause death.

### General anaesthetic

There are a number of possible minor complications (not disabling or life-threatening) such as feeling sick, sore throat, difficulty passing urine and headache.

- Loss or change of hearing
- Eye injury
- Nerve injury
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Chest infection and other breathing problems
- Allergic reaction
- Death
- Reduced effectiveness of hormonal contraceptives



A catheter in the epidural space

## Epidural or spinal anaesthetic

- The epidural or spinal not working properly
- Low blood pressure
- Headache
- Infection around your spine
- Cardiovascular collapse (where your heart stops)
- Short-term nerve injury
- Blood clot around your spine
- Paralysis or death

## Local anaesthetic

- Not enough pain relief
- Allergic reaction
- Bleeding
- Nerve damage
- Absorption into your bloodstream

## Summary

There are different forms of anaesthesia that can be used to provide a safe and effective way for you to have an operation or procedure, and to give you pain relief. Most people do not have any problems and are satisfied with their anaesthetic.

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.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

## Acknowledgements

### Reviewer

Elizabeth Pemberton (MBBS, BMedSci, FANZCA)

### Illustrator

Medical Illustration Copyright © Nucleus Medical Art. All rights reserved. [www.nucleusinc.com](http://www.nucleusinc.com)