

You may get muscle soreness due to either the muscle relaxant, or the muscle activity caused by the seizure.

### Precautions

The anaesthetic will affect your judgement for the first 24 hours after your treatment.

### During this time YOU MUST NOT:

- drive any type of vehicle or operate machinery, including cooking implements.
- make important decisions or sign a legal document.
- drink alcohol, take un-prescribed mind-altering substances, or smoke cigarettes or other substances as they may interact with the anaesthetic medications.

### There is no evidence that ECT causes brain damage or any harmful changes in personality.

All treatments have risks and side effects (even no treatment has risks).

### Is further ECT needed?

Around 60-70% of people who have ECT for depression say their symptoms clear completely. Up to 80% say they get some benefit from ECT treatment.

However, there is a high chance that the illness could come back once the course of ECT is finished. To help prevent this, your doctor will discuss with you any further treatment you may need after your ECT course, such as:

- medication
- maintenance ECT
- psychotherapy.

### Where else can I go for information?

Ask your doctor and/or nurse if you do not understand your treatment or if you have any concerns about ECT.

You are also entitled to a second opinion from another doctor.

Further information about ECT is available online, including:

- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP), Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) fact sheet, available on the RANZCP's Your Health in Mind web page: <https://www.yourhealthinmind.org/>
- Queensland Health information booklet: A Guide to Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) for Consumers and Carers: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/clinical-staff/mental-health/act/topics/treatment-care>
- Gold Coast Health Videos for consumers, families and carers demonstrating the Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) patient journey at Gold Coast Health. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEot7ow3yfk> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljoS31JCOAs>
- There are various websites online which may be helpful. It is important to be aware that some are ill informed and deliberately 'anti ECT'.

Further information on patient rights is available online, including:

- The Queensland Mental Health Act 2016 Patient Rights fact sheet: <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health/rights/mental-health-act>
- The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/national-priorities/charter-of-healthcare-rights/>



# Information about Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

## A fact sheet for you and your family

This resource was developed by the Queensland Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) Committee under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist.

This fact sheet provides information about ECT. Before you consent to the treatment you should read it and talk with the staff (doctors and nurses) about any concerns you have regarding ECT.

ECT is a medical treatment for severe depression, mania and schizophrenia. It involves carefully passing a small electrical current through the brain. ECT is safe, painless and very effective in appropriately selected clinical situations.



## Why is ECT used?

- It works. ECT can improve or clear depression symptoms in about 80% of patients. It can also help with other conditions such as mania and schizophrenia.
- It works quickly. ECT can be a life-saving treatment for people who are at risk of suicide, or who are not eating or drinking.
- It is safe and there are few side effects.
- It provides another treatment option if medication is not working or if a patient has side effects from their medication.

## Why do I need ECT?

This is a question to ask your doctor when discussing possible treatments. ECT may only be one part of a chosen treatment plan.

## How does ECT work?

For a long time (since the 1930s) doctors knew that ECT worked for some patients, without knowing exactly how it worked. Now much more is known about the how the brain functions and in particular, about the chemicals that enable nerves to work together. A form of 'brain electricity' is needed to release these chemicals (called neurotransmitters). More recent research has shown that ECT helps nerve cells to be restored and even new ones to grow.

## How well does ECT work?

Of people diagnosed with severe depression who receive ECT, more than eight out of ten respond well. This makes ECT the most effective treatment for severe depression. People who have responded well to ECT report it makes them feel 'like themselves again' and 'that life is worth living again'.

## How safe is ECT?

ECT is among the safest medical treatments given under anaesthesia. The risk of death or serious injury with ECT is very low.

Patients with heart problems may be at higher risk for complications. However, if you do have heart disease it may still be possible for you to have ECT safely. Special precautions such as heart monitoring can be implemented to safely administer ECT in these circumstances. Your doctor will ask another specialist to advise if there are grounds for concern.

ECT has recently been shown to be a safe and effective treatment for older patients with severe mood disorders where medication does not work well enough, or where there are problems with side effects.

## Potential side effects of ECT

The most common physical side effects are nausea, headache and muscle stiffness. Some patients may be confused just after they wake up from treatment however this generally clears within an hour or so. You may not remember some past events, names of friends and telephone numbers. In most cases, these memories return in hours or within a few days. Although sometimes patients continue to experience some memory problems for several weeks, side effects are now less of a problem with modern ECT.

## What is a course of ECT?

A course of ECT usually consists of up to 12 treatments, with individual treatments given two or three times a week. Some people may get better with as few as 3 treatments, and others may occasionally need more than 12 treatments. Your consent is given for up to 12 treatments only. If you need further ECT, you will have a medical review and be asked to sign a new consent. You may withdraw consent at any time during the course of treatment.

In exceptional circumstances, ECT can be performed at an authorised mental health service without the patient's consent. This is where ECT is necessary to save the patient's life or prevent the patient from suffering irreparable harm. The doctor must apply to the Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT) for approval

for the ECT. For more information about the MHRT, see <http://www.mhrt.qld.gov.au/>.

## What to expect on the treatment day

### Immediately before the treatment

ECT treatment involves having an anaesthetic. You will need to fast (have nothing to eat or drink) from about midnight the night before each treatment.

### During the treatment

For the treatment you should wear loose clothes or nightclothes. You will be asked to remove any loose jewellery or accessories. The treatment takes place in a dedicated treatment area and only takes a few minutes.

You will have a blood pressure cuff on your arm and a small device over a finger to check pulse and oxygen levels in your blood. Small stick-on electrodes are placed on your forehead and behind your ears to record the brain's electrical activity during the treatment.

You will be given an anaesthetic, which will make you sleep and cause your muscles to relax completely. You will be given oxygen to breathe through a mask. Once you are asleep the doctor will activate a part of your brain with a measured electric stimulus. This causes a brief convulsion (seizure) which is carefully monitored and controlled. There is little movement of your body because of the relaxant given by the anaesthetist.

### Immediately after treatment

When you wake up you will be in the recovery area with a nurse, who will make you as comfortable as possible and offer reassurance. Once you are wide awake you will be offered a cup of tea and some food.

### After the ECT

You may have some side effects from the anaesthetic, such as headache or nausea. You should tell the staff looking after you, who will be able to give you some medication to help with the side effects.