



This information sheet answers frequently asked questions about having local anaesthetic. It has been developed to be used in discussion with your doctor or healthcare professional.

1. What is local anaesthetic and how will it help me?

A local anaesthetic is used to numb a small part of your body and stop you feeling pain. You will be awake and aware of what is happening. Local anaesthetic is used when nerves can be easily reached by drops, sprays, ointments or injections.

Local anaesthetic generally has less side-effects and risks than a general anaesthetic (which is also generally a safe procedure if required).

For some procedures or operations, sedation is given with local anaesthetic. If this is required for your procedure, you will be given further information about this.

2. What are the risks of local anaesthetic?

Although every anaesthetic has a risk of side effects and complications, local anaesthesia is generally very safe.

Common side effects and complications include:

- pain and bruising at the injection site.

Uncommon side effects and complications include:

- temporary nerve damage, for a few days to months, causing weakness and/or numbness of the part of the body that the nerve goes to
- the local anaesthetic does not work: this may require a further injection of anaesthetic or a different type of anaesthetic; your doctor will discuss this with you if required
- infection at the site of injection requiring antibiotics and further treatment
- damage to surrounding structures such as blood vessels, nerves and muscles
- allergy to the local anaesthetic solution.

Rare risks and complications include:

- permanent nerve damage
- overdose of local anaesthetic
- seizures
- cardiac arrest
- death (very rare).

3. What are my specific risks?

There may also be risks specific to your individual condition and circumstances. Your doctor/healthcare professional will discuss these with you. Ensure they are written on the consent form before you sign it.

4. What are the risks of not having this anaesthetic?

There may be consequences if you choose not to have the proposed anaesthetic. Please discuss these with your doctor/healthcare professional.

5. Who will give me the local anaesthetic?

Your local anaesthetic will be given to you by an anaesthetist, your treating doctor or their team, a GP with training in anaesthetics (particularly in rural areas), or a doctor/healthcare professional/student undergoing further training. All trainees are supervised according to relevant professional guidelines.

6. What are my responsibilities before having a local anaesthetic?

You are at less risk of problems from an anaesthetic if you do the following:

In preparation for your procedure:

- Increase your fitness before your procedure to improve your blood circulation and lung health. Ask your GP about exercising safely.
- If you are overweight, losing some weight will reduce many of the risks of having an anaesthetic. Ask your GP about losing weight safely.
- Stop smoking as early as possible before your surgery to give your lungs and heart a chance to improve. Smoking cuts down the oxygen in your blood and increases breathing problems during and after an operation. Phone 13 QUIT (13 78 48).
- Drink less alcohol, as alcohol may alter the effect of the anaesthetic medicines.
- Do not drink any alcohol 24 hours before surgery.



6. What are my responsibilities before having a local anaesthetic? *(continued)*

- Stop taking recreational drugs (this includes recreational smoking such as marijuana) before your surgery as these may affect the anaesthetic.
- If you take anticoagulant or antiplatelet (blood thinning) medicines, such as warfarin, aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix, Iscover, Coplavix), prasugrel (Effient), dipyridamole (Persantin or Asasantin), ticagrelor (Brilinta), ticlopidine (Tilodene), apixaban (Eliquis), dabigatran (Pradaxa), rivaroxaban (Xarelto) or complementary/herbal/alternative medicines, such as fish oil or turmeric:
 - ask your surgeon and/or anaesthetist if you should stop taking it before surgery as it may affect your blood clotting
 - do NOT stop blood thinning medicines without medical advice
 - if you are asked to stop taking blood thinning medicine before your procedure, ask your doctor when you can restart the blood thinning medicine.

On the day of your procedure:

- **Nothing to eat or drink** ('nil by mouth'): you will be told when to have your last meal and drink. Do NOT eat (including lollies), drink, or chew gum after this time otherwise your operation may be delayed or cancelled. This is to make sure your stomach is empty so that if you vomit, there will be nothing to go into your lungs.
- **If you are a smoker or drink alcohol:** do not smoke or drink alcohol.
- **If you are taking medicines:** most medicines should be continued before an operation, but there are some important exceptions:
 - your doctor will provide specific instructions about your medicines
 - take to the hospital all your prescribed medicines, those medicines you buy over the counter, herbal remedies and supplements to show your anaesthetist what you are taking.
- **If you feel unwell:** telephone the ward/hospital for advice.

6. What are my responsibilities before having a local anaesthetic? *(continued)*

- Tell your doctor and the anaesthetist if you have:
 - health problems (e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure, infectious diseases, serious illnesses), including if regular treatment or a stay in hospital is needed
 - a drug addiction
 - had previous problems and/or known family problems with anaesthesia
 - false teeth, caps, loose teeth or other dental problems
 - been taking prescribed and/or over the counter medicines, herbal remedies and supplements; this may include and are not limited to blood thinning medicines, the contraceptive pill, antidepressants and/or diabetic medicines (e.g. insulin)
 - allergies/intolerances of any type and side effects.

7. What happens after the local anaesthetic procedure?

The area that has been numbed may remain numb or weak for several hours and sometimes up to 24 hours.

For your own safety:

- take care not to injure or bump the area that has been numbed with the local anaesthetic as you will not be able to feel pain
- do not place hot or very cold things on the affected area as this could cause burns
- if you have a 'weak' leg, do not walk without a person to assist you
- ask your doctor/healthcare professional whether you can:
 - drive any type of car, bike or other vehicle
 - operate machinery including cooking implements
- if the numbness/weakness has not gone away after 24 hours, contact the hospital.



