

# Patient Information for Consent

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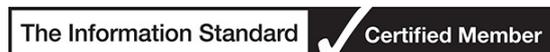
A03 Local Anaesthetic  
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## What is a local anaesthetic?

A local anaesthetic is a drug that is injected into the tissues to make them numb. It can be used to give effective pain relief during and after an operation or procedure. The local anaesthetic will be given to you either by your surgeon or anaesthetist (doctor trained in anaesthesia).

A local anaesthetic has been recommended for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with a local anaesthetic or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your surgeon or anaesthetist, or the healthcare team.

## How does a local anaesthetic work?

Local anaesthetics temporarily stop nerves working so that you do not feel pain. The simplest form of local anaesthesia is to inject the anaesthetic just around the area where the operation is going to take place. This tends to sting or burn for a few seconds and then the area goes numb. The feeling of pain goes away much sooner than the feeling of touch, so do not be alarmed if you can still feel pressure or movement.

It is possible to numb all the nerves to an arm or a leg (a nerve block).

The operation will not start until you and your surgeon are both satisfied that the area is numb to pain.

Although the starting area is numb, the operation may reach areas that have not been numbed. Your surgeon will give you some more local anaesthetic until those areas are numb to pain.

Local anaesthetics generally work for a few hours, depending on the type of anaesthetic and dose used. After this time the area should go back to normal.

## Are there any alternatives to a local anaesthetic?

If you are concerned about being awake during the operation, it may be possible for it to be performed under a general anaesthetic. There are complications associated with a general anaesthetic.

Other forms of anaesthesia may be possible, such as an epidural or nerve block, although these also use local anaesthetics. Sometimes it may be possible to use a sedative as well as a local anaesthetic.

## What can I do to help make the operation a success?

### Keeping warm

It is important to keep warm around the time of the operation. Your anaesthetist will take steps to keep you warm when you are having the operation.

The hospital may be colder than your home, so bring extra clothing or a dressing gown. If you become too cold you may have a higher risk of developing complications such as an infection of the surgical site (wound) or heart problems. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.

### Lifestyle changes

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the operation may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

## What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had a local anaesthetic. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

You should ask your surgeon or anaesthetist if there is anything you do not understand.

- Not enough pain relief is usually corrected by giving more local anaesthetic. Sometimes other types of painkillers or forms of anaesthesia need to be given as well. Let your surgeon or doctor know if you are in pain.
- Allergic reaction to local anaesthetics. This is unusual. Many people have been told, or think, they are allergic to local anaesthetic given at the dentist. This is rare but let the person giving you the local anaesthetic know if you have reacted to sulphites or to any medications or tests in the past.
- Bleeding, if the needle used to inject the local anaesthetic strikes a blood vessel. This usually results in a small bruise that will not cause problems.
- Nerve damage (risk: 1 in 5,000). Sometimes the local anaesthetic has a longer effect than expected (up to 2 days) but this usually gets better.
- Local anaesthetic toxicity, if the local anaesthetic is accidentally injected into your bloodstream or if it is absorbed into your bloodstream too quickly. This usually makes only your lips tingle or your ears ring. You may feel light-headed and have a seizure (risk: less than 1 in 500). The dose of anaesthetic is always limited to reduce this risk.

## Summary

A local anaesthetic can be used for most people, usually giving a safe and effective form of pain relief during and after an operation or procedure. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about the anaesthetic. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

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

### Acknowledgements

Reviewer: Dr Iain Moppett DM MRCP FRCA

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