



# GENERAL ANAESTHETIC EXPLAINED

## **Starting a general anaesthetic (induction)**

Induction usually takes place in the anaesthetic room, although you may go direct to the operating theatre. If you have had premedication to help you relax, you may not remember this later.

There are two ways of starting a general anaesthetic. Either:

- anaesthetic drugs may be given through the cannula (this is generally used for adults); or
- you can breathe anaesthetic gases and oxygen through a mask, which you may hold if you prefer.

Induction happens very quickly, and you will become unconscious within a minute or so. People usually describe a swimmy, light-headed feeling.

If it hurts when anaesthetic drugs are given through your cannula, it is important that you tell your anaesthetist.

Once you are unconscious, your anaesthetist will continue to give drugs into your vein or anaesthetic gases to breathe (or both) to keep you anaesthetised.

## **In the operating theatre: general anaesthetics**

When your anaesthetist is satisfied that your condition is stable, the monitors will be temporarily disconnected and you will be taken into the theatre. He or she will stay with you and will be constantly aware of your condition, checking the monitors, adjusting the anaesthetic and giving you any fluids or drugs that you need.

These are some of the drugs you may be given during your anaesthetic:

- anaesthetic drugs to keep you anaesthetised
- pain-relieving drugs to keep you pain-free during and after your operation
- muscle relaxants to relax or temporarily paralyse the muscles of your body
- antibiotics to guard against infection
- anti-sickness drugs to stop you feeling sick
- other drugs depending on your condition as it changes

Your anaesthetist will choose a way of making sure that you can breathe easily. He or she may do this by simply tilting your head back and lifting your chin. You may have a tube placed in your airway. Keeping your airway open is essential for your safety.

For some operations, muscle relaxants, which will stop you breathing, are necessary. Your anaesthetist will use a machine (a ventilator) to 'breathe' for you.

At the end of the operation, your anaesthetist will stop giving anaesthetic drugs. If muscle relaxants have been used, a drug that reverses their effect will be given. When your anaesthetist is sure that you are recovering normally, you will be taken to the recovery room.

### **After a general anaesthetic**

Most people regain consciousness in the recovery room. Recovery staff will be with you at all times and will continue to monitor your blood pressure, oxygen levels and pulse rate.

- You may receive pain-relieving drugs before you regain consciousness, but if you are in pain, tell the staff so they can give you more.
- Oxygen will be given through a lightweight clear-plastic mask, which covers your mouth and nose. Breathing oxygen keeps up its levels in your blood while the anaesthetic wears off. The staff will remove your mask as soon as these levels are maintained without oxygen.
- If you feel sick, you may be given drugs which will help this.
- Depending on the operation you have had, you may have a urine catheter. This is a thin soft tube put temporarily into the bladder to drain it.
- When you are fully alert, dentures, hearing aids and glasses can be returned to you.

- You may shiver after your operation. If you are cold you will be warmed with a warming blanket.