

Local anaesthesia for eye surgery

Your surgeon has recommended that you have an eye operation under local anaesthetic. Local anaesthetic is a drug which stops you feeling pain. Once you have been given the local anaesthetic you will still be awake and aware of what is happening to you but the aim is that you feel no pain during the operation.

What are the advantages of local anaesthesia?

A local anaesthetic generally works very well at preventing you feeling any pain during the operation. It also gives you pain relief after the operation for several hours. It usually has fewer risks and side effects than a general anaesthetic, especially if you are elderly.

This is because it doesn't affect any other part of your body, such as your breathing or your heart. People recover more quickly following surgery under local anaesthetic and can go home on the same day.

Unlike a general anaesthetic, you will be able to eat and drink as normal.

I would really prefer a general anaesthetic, do I have a choice?

Yes, nothing will happen to you until you understand and agree with what has been planned for you.

If you do have a preference for a general anaesthetic, you should discuss this with your anaesthetist or surgeon. There may be a medical reason why you should not have a general anaesthetic. You may need to wait longer for your operation and it may delay your discharge home.

How is the local anaesthetic given?

After using drops to numb the surface of the eye an injection is given around the eye (avoiding the eyeball itself).

Is the injection painful?

This varies from person to person. Eye drops that numb the surface of the eye are used first to make it as comfortable as possible. A very fine needle is used and there may be a feeling of stinging or pressure which usually lasts less than a minute.

Are there any complications of local anaesthesia?

Local anaesthesia for eye surgery is regarded as the safest anaesthetic for many people.

Side effects of local anaesthetic injections:

- Double vision whilst the eye muscles are numb from the local anaesthetic for approximately one day.
- Swelling of the conjunctiva (chemosis). This will settle quickly.
- Sometimes you may develop bruising or a black eye as the injection damages a small blood vessel around the eye. This is not usually serious but can look unsightly for a week or so. It is more common if you take aspirin or other drugs that thin the blood.
- Rarely, there is more important bleeding around the eye. This can mean your operation will have to be delayed to another day.
- 1 in 10 people may have mild pain from the surgery when the numbness wears off.

Serious complications are very rare.

Although rare or very rare, damage to the eye, blood vessels or eye muscles and effects on your heart, blood pressure and breathing can happen. Your anaesthetist or eye surgeon will be able to give more information about these complications.

Local anaesthetic is not recommended if you:

- cannot lie reasonably flat
- have an illness (e.g. Parkinson's) that makes being still difficult
- have a cough you cannot control
- have severe hearing difficulties
- will have difficulty understanding what is being said
- have severe claustrophobia
- have a known allergy to local anaesthetic drugs

If any of these apply to you please inform your doctor as a general anaesthetic may be required.

Can I have something to help calm me down?

Your anaesthetist and theatre staff are very used to helping people relax. Sedatives can sometimes make you very sleepy and slow your breathing which can lead to difficulty during the operation.

Please feel free to discuss any concerns you may have with your anaesthetist.

Useful organisations

The Royal College of Anaesthetists
www.rcoa.ac.uk
Tel: 02070921500

The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland
www.aagbi.org
Tel: 02076314352

This publication includes text taken from The Royal College of Anaesthetists' (RCoA) leaflet 'Local anaesthesia for your eye operation', 2008 but the RCoA has not reviewed this as a whole.

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Patient Information

Local anaesthetic injections for eye surgery

This leaflet is for people who have been recommended for surgery under local anaesthesia. It outlines how it is carried out, potential risks as well as benefits, and what to expect afterwards. You can find more information in other leaflets on the website www.rcoa.ac.uk

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