

Local Anaesthetic

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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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 a procedure.

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 procedure is going to take place.

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

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?

If you are worried about being awake during the procedure, it may be possible for it to be performed under a general anaesthetic (where you are sent to sleep for the procedure).

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 complications can happen?

The healthcare team are trained to reduce the risk of complications.

Possible complications of an anaesthetic are shown below. Some can be serious and may even cause death.

Any risk rates given are taken from studies of people who have had this procedure. Your doctor or anaesthetist may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you. Some risks are higher if you are older, obese, have other health problems or you smoke. Health problems include diabetes, heart disease or lung disease.

- Not enough pain relief. This is usually corrected by giving more local anaesthetic.
- Allergic reaction.
- Bleeding.

- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication.
- Nerve damage.
- Local anaesthetic toxicity. You may feel light-headed and have a seizure.

Summary

A local anaesthetic can be used for most people, giving a safe and effective form of pain relief during and after a procedure.

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

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

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Reviewer

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