Local Anaesthesia for your eye operation
An information guide
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Introduction

You and your doctor have agreed that you need an operation on your eye. A local anaesthetic has been recommended. Some people find it really useful to know as much as possible about what is going to happen in an operation. For others, it’s not so important. You will be able to judge for yourself how much you want to know. Eye operations can be done using either a local anaesthetic or a general anaesthetic. Most eye operations are carried out using local anaesthetic.

This leaflet is about the use of local anaesthetic during your eye operation. It will explain what a local anaesthetic is, how it differs from a general anaesthetic and how it works. It has been written by patients, patient representatives, eye surgeons and anaesthetists working together.

It also gives a step-by-step guide to how the local anaesthetic will be given and monitored during your operation.

Local anaesthesia

Local anaesthetics are drugs which stop you feeling pain. They can be given as eye drops and/or injections. Once you have been given the local anaesthetic the area around your eye will be numb. With a local anaesthetic you will stay awake and be aware of what is happening. You should not feel any pain but may feel discomfort and feel touch or tugging.

What is the difference between local and general anaesthesia?

With a general anaesthetic you are in a state of controlled unconsciousness during the operation and will not be aware of what is happening as you are asleep.
What are the advantages of local anaesthesia?
Local anaesthesia is useful because it works really well at preventing you feeling any pain during your surgery. It also offers pain relief after the operation. It has fewer risks and side effects than a general anaesthetic. 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. You can continue to take any prescribed medicine you are on and may be able to eat and drink as normal. Your hospital will advise you about this.

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. You may need to wait longer for your operation. If you have certain medical problems you may be strongly advised to have a particular type of anaesthesia because of the risks involved.

How is the local anaesthetic given?
There are two main different methods.

• Some eye operations can be carried out with eye drops numbing the area. In this case you do not need an injection

• Many eye operations will require local anaesthetic injections. Numbing eye drops will be given before the injection to make it less sensitive for you. The injection will be given near to the eye, but not in to the eyeball. A very fine needle is used and there may be a feeling of stinging or pressure, which only lasts for a minute.
Are there any complications of local anaesthesia?

Eye surgery under local anaesthesia is very safe. Sometimes the tissues around the eye can swell after the injection of the local anaesthetic drug or because of a small amount of bleeding following the injection. Bruising around the eye may occur. This type of swelling usually settles within a day or two. If bleeding is severe, your operation may be postponed. Some people see double for a short period after the operation. This usually corrects within a few days.

Serious complications are very rare.

Serious complications are:

- damage to the eye
- damage to blood vessels behind the eye
- spread of local anaesthetic drugs to other areas of the body
- effect on your heart, blood pressure and breathing.

These are all very rare. These complications are difficult to predict. The anaesthetist will be able to go into detail about the rare complications of local anaesthesia, should you wish to know about them.

Almost all patients can have surgery under local anaesthesia.

However please tell your anaesthetist if you:

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

If any of these points applies to you it is important that you talk or write to your GP, surgeon or anaesthetist before the day of your operation.

Before the operation

Health Check: The Pre-Assessment Clinic

Once the operation date is planned, your health check is essential. You may be asked to attend a pre-operative assessment clinic. Nurses usually conduct the pre-assessment clinic with a doctor available for advice.

Your health is checked and you will be asked about your present and previous health.

If you need any tests these will be arranged at this clinic.

You will be asked about your medications, please bring a list or the medicines themselves in their boxes with you. You will have specific instruction about certain medicines (for example Aspirin, Clopidogrel, Warfarin), please follow them carefully.

The day of the operation

You will be told in advance if and when you should stop eating and drinking.

You can continue to take any prescribed medication as normal, including up to and on the day of your operation, unless you are told differently at the pre-operative assessment.

If you are taking Aspirin or are diabetic, please check with the hospital. You may need to stop medication a few days before your operation.
Please bring any medication you are taking with you to the hospital on the day of your operation so the doctors and nurses can check them. You may need to continue taking your medication while you are in hospital.

**In hospital**

You will be seen by your eye specialist (ophthalmologist) and anaesthetist. Your eye specialist will check the eye that is being operated on and discuss the operation with you. Your anaesthetist will explain the anaesthetic.

**What happens next?**

- You may be asked to get changed into a hospital gown
- Please use the toilet before you go to theatre to be able to lie comfortably
- Depending on the type of operation you are having the ward nurses may give you some eye dropsto dilate your pupil (make your pupil bigger). These may make your sight slightly blurred
- The ward staff will accompany you to theatre. You can walk, or if you prefer you will be brought on a trolley or in a wheelchair
- The staff in the theatre will ask you some questions to check your name, date of birth, hospital number and check that you have signed a consent form. They will also check again which eye is being operated on.

**Can I have something to help calm me down?**

Sedatives can sometimes lead to difficulty during the operation as they can affect your breathing.

Please discuss your wishes with your anaesthetist.
What happens in the anaesthetic room?
To ensure your safety during your operation, your anaesthetist will attach you to machines to watch:

- **your heart**: sticky patches will be placed on your chest (electrocardiogram or ECG)
- **your blood pressure**: blood pressure cuff may be placed on your arm
- **the oxygen level in your blood**: a clip will be placed on your finger (pulse oximeter).

Your anaesthetist may need to give you drugs into a vein. A needle will be used to put a thin plastic tube (a cannula) into a vein in the back of your hand or arm. This is taped down to stop it slipping out.

The anaesthetist will give you either:

- anaesthetic eye drops
- and/or an injection around the eye through a fine needle or a tube.

Once your eye begins to feel numb it will be kept closed to prevent any damage. You might feel a light pressure on your closed eyelids. This helps the anaesthetic drug to work evenly.

Will the local anaesthetic injection hurt?
This varies from person to person. There may be some discomfort or a stinging or burning sensation.
How do I know that the anaesthetic is working?

Your doctor will check your eye to make sure it is numb. You may be asked to look in different directions to assess the effects of the anaesthetic. To check your eye has become numb, eye drops, which sting will be given. If the anaesthetic is working, you will not feel the stinging.

Once you and the anaesthetist are happy that the anaesthetic has worked, the monitors will be temporarily detached and you will be taken into the operating theatre.

The operation

What happens in the operating theatre?

• The heart and pulse monitors will be reattached
• The nurse will check you are lying comfortably on the operating table and that your head is supported
• A sterile surgical sheet will be placed over your face to keep the area around your eye clean. The sheet will have a hole in it so the surgeon can see your eye to be operated on
• A tube may be placed under the surgical sheet, which will blow fresh air around your mouth and nose. This is to help you breathe easily during the operation and to feel comfortable
• You may be aware of the area around your eye being cleaned with a cold fluid to keep it sterile
• You may feel a bit of water running down your face. This is quite normal as the surgeon uses a very weak salt-water solution to keep your eye moist.

Your anaesthetic nurse will be with you and hold your hand throughout the operation.
Can I speak during the operation?

No. It is best not to speak whilst the surgeon is operating on your eye as this will make your face move and could affect the surgery. If you want to say something, you will be asked to raise your hand or to squeeze the hand of the anaesthetic nurse, who will ask the eye surgeon to stop operating. You can then speak.

Will I see anything?

Many people see some strange lights and movements during the operation and this experience varies amongst patients. This is nothing to worry about.

What will I hear?

You will hear theatre staff speaking to each other. You will also hear theatre equipment making noises and the bleeping sound of your heart monitor.

Can I wear my hearing aid during the operation?

Please remove your hearing aids as they may be damaged by the water used during the operation. If you cannot hear anything without them, it may be possible to cover it up. Talk to the anaesthetist or anaesthetic nurse if this is the case.

What else will happen?

The surgeon operates with fine instruments inside your eye. You will be aware that your surgeon is working, you may feel touch and pressure. You should not experience any sharp pain. If you are uncomfortable you must let the theatre staff know about it.

What if I blink?

You will have a small clip placed in your eye to keep your eyes open, so you cannot blink.
**After the operation**

The operation usually lasts approximately 30 minutes. Your eye may be covered with a shield or pad until the following day to protect it and stop you from rubbing it whilst asleep.

You may experience double vision for a time, due to the after effects of the anaesthetic.

A nurse will escort you back to the ward in a wheelchair.

**What about going home?**

Once you have recovered and your transport arrives, you may go home. Before you go home the ward nurse will give you written instructions about recovering from your operation, for example what activities to avoid. He or she will also tell you about any medication you need to take and will show you how to put your eye drops in if you are unsure what to do. Drops are used following surgery to stop inflammation (swelling) and help prevent infection. You will be asked to attend the ward or the outpatient clinic for a further check up.

**How long does the anaesthetic last?**

- Usually 2-3 hours, although it can last up to 4 hours
- Sometimes double vision may persist for several hours.

**Will I be in pain?**

You may feel some discomfort when the anaesthetic wears off and a mild painkiller such as paracetamol may be required. The hospital will advise you on this before you are discharged. For this reason it is good if you can have someone to help you at home and stay with you for the first night following surgery.
If you experience severe pain contact your GP or the hospital immediately.

**Do I need to take any special care?**
- Avoid rubbing your eyes
- Be careful if the weather is windy as you may get something in your eyes
- Avoid heavy lifting, exercise or swimming
- If your vision gets worse or your eye becomes painful contact the hospital.

**Questions you may like to ask**
- Who will give my anaesthetic?
- How often do you use this type of anaesthetic?
- Do I have to have local anaesthetic?
- What are the risks related to this type of anaesthetic?
- How will I feel after my surgery?

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If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Ethnic Health Team on 0161 627 8770

For general enquiries please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0161 604 5897

For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service

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