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Bridgewater
Community Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Dental care under general anaesthetic



What is general anaesthetic?

General anaesthetic (GA) is a mixture of medicines that are given to patients to make them go to sleep.

An Anaesthetist is a specially trained doctor; they give GA to patients to stop them feeling any pain during dental treatment.

What dental treatments can be carried out under GA?

- Full mouth examination.
- Dental radiographs (x-rays).
- Tooth extractions (removal).
- Fillings.
- Tooth cleaning.
- Fluoride varnish application.

What are the benefits of having GA?

Dental treatment can be carried out quickly whilst the patient is asleep.

Having GA will help the dentist to:

- Carry out a full examination of the patient's mouth
- Identify any causes of pain or infection in patients who may not be able to say they are having problems or are in pain
- Clean, fill and remove teeth if required
- Treat any gum disease, tooth decay and dental infections.

Does the patient need to have a GA?

GA will only be used if you and the dentist agree it is the best option for the patient.

The dentist will discuss other ways of carrying out the dental treatment at the assessment appointment, these include:

- Local anaesthetic (an injection in the gum whilst the patient is awake)
- Sedation (the patient is awake, but drowsy and local anaesthetic is still used).

If the patient has had a GA before, please let the dentist know at the treatment appointment if there were any concerns or problems, such as allergies to the anaesthetic or taking a long time to recover from the anaesthetic.

You know the patient best, so please tell the dentist and Anaesthetist if there is anything we can do to make them more comfortable.

What does the Anaesthetist do?

The Anaesthetist will:

- Discuss with you the best way to keep the patient calm and comfortable
- Look after the patient's health during surgery and recovery
- Be involved with the patient's pain relief after surgery.
- Answer any questions on the day of the GA appointment.

Are there any risks with a GA?

Dental treatment under GA is usually very safe. The patient will be looked after by an Anaesthetist who is trained to keep the patient safe. Although serious complications are very rare, they can happen, such as:

- A serious allergic reaction to the anaesthetic (anaphylaxis)
- Waking up during your operation (accidental awareness), although the amount of anaesthetic given will be continuously monitored to help ensure this does not happen
- Death – this is very rare.

To help reduce the risk of serious complications, repeat GA for dental care will only be carried out when it is absolutely necessary.

In most cases, the benefits of being pain-free during an operation outweigh the risks.

Are there any side effects from having a GA?

There are some common side effects from having a GA, these include:

- Feeling sick
- Sore throat
- Shivering
- Minor damage to lips or tongue
- Being confused.

Can other medical procedures be carried out at the same time as dental treatment?

Blood tests, immunisations, and other tests, such as cardiac monitoring, can be carried out under the same GA as dental care.

Other medical procedures must be agreed before the GA appointment, this is usually done through the patient's medical team.

Please tell the dentist at the assessment appointment if you feel extra procedures are required.

What time do we need to arrive at the hospital?

You should report to the Sanderson Suite reception at St Helens Hospital by 8.30am.

What happens after we arrive?

You will both be shown to a private side room on the ward. The Anaesthetist and Dental team will:

- Check the medical details are correct
- Make sure everyone is happy with the planned care
- Discuss the best way to give the GA; the patient may be given a sedative drink before they have the GA. This can take up to 30 minutes to have an effect
- Check the patient's dental history and tell you about the planned treatment. However, in some cases, the treatment will only be known once the patient is asleep.

How long will the procedure take?

The dental treatment usually takes about one hour.

However, dental treatment can take longer depending on how much dental disease is found and how much treatment is needed.

What happens after the dental treatment?

After waking the patient up, a member of the Hospital team will let you know when the patient is ready to see you.

The Dental team will:

- Tell you about the treatment that has been carried out
- Tell you about the aftercare instructions you must follow
- Give you a leaflet with emergency contact details for when you are at home.

When can we leave the hospital?

There is no set time for how long a patient needs to stay in hospital once they are awake.

You can leave the hospital once you are happy that you can care for the patient at home.

For impartial and confidential advice or information on the services provided by Bridgewater or to receive this leaflet in an alternative format, please call our Patient Services team on 0800 587 0562.