

ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL

Department of Anaesthesia & Pain Medicine

Anaesthesia: Benefits & Risks

Benefits

Surgery is made possible by anaesthesia. This may be *general anaesthesia* where you will be asleep, or *local anaesthesia* where you remain awake or slightly drowsy.

You rightly expect your surgery to be performed without pain. But modern anaesthesia is about more than just stopping you feeling pain. Your anaesthetist is your doctor during the operation. He or she watches and supports your important body functions (eg. your breathing), with hi-tech equipment to make sure you are brought safely through your operation. He or she selects from a range of methods to suit your individual needs so that your surgeon can get the best results.

During your operation, your anaesthetist will look after any health problems you may have (eg. diabetes) and will give you any necessary drugs, such as antibiotics. If you require a blood transfusion your anaesthetist will give you this and generally support you while your surgeon stops the bleeding.

In the event of unexpected problems (such as an asthma attack or heart attack), your anaesthetist will start all needed treatments straight away.

Risks

As with all health treatments, there are some risks with having an anaesthetic. They range from common things such as a sore throat, skin bruising and feeling sick, to less common things such as damage to teeth, a hoarse voice, allergic reactions to drugs, damage to nerves or asthma attacks.

There is a risk of more serious problems such as stroke, heart attack, kidney or lung damage, or even being aware during surgery. On rare occasions, paralysis or death could occur. The chance of these and other serious problems is really low in most people, but may be higher in people who have other health problems.

The size of the risks depends on the type of operation you are having and on what other health problems you have. When you meet your anaesthetist before your operation, ***you are strongly urged to ask any questions*** you have about anaesthesia, including the risks.

Balancing the Benefits and the Risks

All anaesthetics at Royal Perth Hospital are given either by a doctor who has specialised in anaesthesia, or by a supervised doctor who is training to be a specialist. The five years of additional specialist training ensures that there is no safer place in the world to have an anaesthetic.

In almost all cases, the good gained from surgery is much greater than the risks of anaesthesia.

However, it is your right to be informed about treatments you receive and in the end, it is you who must decide which treatments you wish to have.

Your anaesthetist will be pleased to provide you with further information.

More information can be obtained from the RPH Website: www.rph.wa.gov.au/anaes/index.html

Click on ***Patient Tour***