

Patient information leaflet

# All about your anaesthetic

## **5** After your operation: pain management and discharge



For patients having a surgical procedure at a Care UK independent diagnostic and treatment centre



This is the fifth in a series of patient information leaflets which will provide you with information about the different types of anaesthesia and what to expect during your admission to a treatment centre for your operation. The other leaflets have given you some general information about the basic concepts of anaesthesia and how to prepare for your day of surgery, as well as more detailed information about the different types of anaesthesia that are available.

This fifth leaflet in the series looks at what happens when the operation has finished and considers the recovery period, the process of discharge and the options for pain management after surgery.

It should be noted that before discharge, you will be given specific discharge advice and documentation from the ward nurses. This will provide information in relation to the specific surgical

procedure undertaken, the follow-up arrangements and a help-line number if you have any urgent concerns or queries.

The blank page at the end of the leaflet is for you to make a note of anything you don't understand, or questions you would like to ask the anaesthetist when they come to see you after your admission to the Care UK NHS Treatment Centre.

## Pain relief after the operation

It is the responsibility of the anaesthetist to plan with you how best to deal with the pain that your surgical procedure will cause. Good pain relief is very important for recovery from anaesthesia and surgery, both in the short-term in relation to day-case discharge time and for the more long-term effects, particularly with mobilisation after limb surgery, recovery of bowel function after abdominal surgery and in general terms, getting back to normal after your surgical procedure.

**Please note:** Pain can also be a warning sign that something is not quite right after the surgery and so it is very important that you always ask for help, especially if you feel a level of pain which you class as severe.

There are differences between people as to the pain relief they require for exactly the same procedure and also different procedures will cause different degrees of post-operative pain. Planning is crucial because it is much easier to relieve pain if it is dealt with **before** it gets to a severe level. Pain relief can be increased by using i) different medications or ii) different combinations of medication, iii) increasing the dose given or iv) changing the frequency at which it is given – i.e. to give it more often.



## For local and regional anaesthetic procedures

Post-operative pain is usually not a problem because the same local anaesthetic injection that provided anaesthesia for the surgical procedure should also provide excellent pain relief after the operation for several hours.

## For general anaesthetic procedures

You may also have received a nerve or a plexus block performed by the anaesthetist as part of the plan for anaesthesia and pain relief; this would have been discussed with you before the surgery.

Leaflet 4 – '*Regional anaesthesia and associated risks*' will provide you with details of these procedures.

- These are performed to assist the general anaesthetic and for post-operative pain relief
- When they work well, they may provide excellent pain relief for up to 24 hours post-operation – or even longer in some cases
- A small proportion of these blocks however, may fail to provide adequate pain relief and need to be 'rescued' either by medication or a further nerve block
- When nerve blocks are not used, local anaesthetics are often injected by the surgeon in and around the wound site, often

encouraged by the anaesthetist to perform. This local anaesthetic infiltration will provide good pain relief but may not work for all patients.

## Pain-relieving medication

Some analgesic medication will have been administered to you before arriving in the recovery room, either as tablets in the 'premed', as intravenous injections as part of the anaesthetic 'cocktail', or both. If additional pain relief is required after the operation, it can take a variety of forms:

- By mouth – pills, tablets, liquids to swallow. You will need to be eating and drinking, not feeling sick and will take about 30 minutes to work
- Injections – Intravenous injections of pain killers will work much quicker and will be given to you in the recovery room if you complain of moderate to severe pain
- Per rectum (suppositories) – similar drugs as those taken orally but very useful if you cannot take anything by mouth or are feeling very nauseated
- PCA (Patient-controlled analgesia) – These are not commonly used in our treatment centres but are available if required. A strong pain killer is given intravenously but the rate at which it is given is dictated by the patient, who controls a special pump with a hand-held button.

## Recovery and discharge

How you feel after your operation will depend on a number of factors and there are wide differences between people as to their anaesthetic recovery times. They include:

- Your general health and fitness
- Type and duration of surgery that has been performed
- Type of anaesthetic that was used and the amount of sedative drugs used in addition
- Level of pain relief and amount of post-operative pain-relieving medication given
- Any associated nausea and vomiting in the early post-operative period

For day-case patients, the ward nursing staff will need to be satisfied:

- That you can mobilize well; physiotherapy staff will be available to assist you with this on the ward
- That your pain control is good
- That you are able to eat and drink
- That you have been able to pass urine
- And that you have a suitable escort to take you home and stay with you for 24 hours
  - Before allowing you to be discharged from the treatment centre.

**Please note:** Before discharge, you will be given a help-desk number which is available 24 hours and can be used if you have any concerns at all about your surgical procedure, the anaesthetic, your pain control and any other worries you may have or symptoms you may have developed.

**WARNING:** It is not advisable to consume alcohol or take drugs or medicines that have not been prescribed by your anaesthetist, surgeon or GP during your recovery period. It is also advised that you do not drive or operate machinery whilst taking pain relief medicines or recovering from surgery. The recovery period will vary between different patients, depending in part on the patient themselves but also on the type and length of surgery that has been undertaken and the anaesthetic that has been used. This advice is particularly relevant to patients having day-case surgery and returning home only a few hours after the operation has finished.

In general terms, it is advisable not to consume any alcohol on the day of surgery but probably sensible to avoid it for up to 48 hours after the surgical procedure.

Similarly, it is very important that you do not drive, operate machinery or sign legal documents for up to 48 hours after surgery. However, this period may need to be prolonged if, for example, you are prescribed

strong pain-relieving medication to take home with you, which may affect your concentration, your judgement and make you drowsy.

Please ask your surgeon about returning to driving after your operation; **you may have a legal duty to inform your insurer!**

\*\* Care UK can provide guidance and information on new drug prescriptions and driving legislation upon request. \*\*



