Spinal anaesthesia (Day Surgery)

What is it?

A spinal anaesthetic consists of a single injection of local anaesthetic into the fluid around the nerves in your spine.

A spinal anaesthetic is suitable for most operations below the waistline.

How does it work?

The local anaesthetic is an injection in the small of your back. It numbs the nerves to the lower body and legs and makes them feel very warm and tingling at first and then very heavy.

In the Day Surgery Unit we use short acting drugs and the effects can last up to 4 hours.

You can choose to be sedated or to stay awake.

Following a spinal anaesthetic it is important you do not get out of bed until you have been assessed by your nurse. Please wait for assistance.

Advantages

- You will need a minimal amount of medication to have your operation and therefore recover quicker than after a general anaesthetic.
- The anaesthetic does not affect your lungs.
- The immediate pain relief is very good and the overall need for strong pain killers is less than after a general anaesthetic.
- Queasiness or sickness is reduced after a spinal anaesthetic and you will be able to start eating and drinking more quickly.
Side effects

• The spinal anaesthetic may occasionally not work properly. A general anaesthetic will then be given.

• Low blood pressure: this is treated with medication and fluid given in a drip.

• You might experience itchy skin for a few hours due to the addition of the strong pain killer to the local anaesthetic injection.

• Passing urine the first time after the spinal anaesthetic can occasionally be a problem especially if you are a man with prostate problems. A urinary catheter might be required initially.

Complications

• Headache: Around 1 in 500 persons that have a spinal anaesthetic develop a headache 1 - 3 days after the anaesthetic.

• Temporary paraesthesia: There is a small risk of temporary pins and needles lasting hours or days in part of the area where the spinal anaesthetic has worked.

• Permanent paraesthesia: In a very few cases there may be lasting pins and needles in part of your legs and lower body (less than 1 in 90,000 at best, less than 1 in 50,000 persons in a worst case scenario).

• On extremely rare occasions bleeding or infection in the spinal space has been reported.

Discharge advice

Most patients experience no problems after their spinal anaesthetic. However, you can experience the following:

• A headache in the first couple of days after you have gone home. Please contact the Day Surgery Unit for advice and/or treatment.

  Day Surgery Unit telephone number: 01284 713050
  8.00am – 8.00pm Monday to Friday

• If the headache appears and you need to contact us out of hours, contact the hospital switchboard on 01284 713000 and ask for the on-call anaesthetist.
• If the tingling in your legs is persistent after 48 hours or getting worse, contact the hospital switchboard on 01284 713000 and ask for the on-call obstetric anaesthetist.

• If you develop sudden onset leg weakness or loss of bowl and bladder control you should immediately seek medical advice. Contact, the hospital switchboard on 01284 713000 and ask for the on-call obstetric anaesthetist.

• If you have new onset lower back ache or high temperature in the first couple of days after the anaesthetic. Please contact your GP or out-of-hours on-call doctor urgently for further treatment.

More information can be found at: www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo: ‘Your Spinal Anaesthetic’.

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo) https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust

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