

General anaesthetics:

Risks and side effects

Everyone is different and it is not possible to know who will experience a side effect or risk. Some are more likely in people who have existing health conditions or need certain operations.




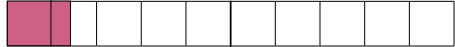





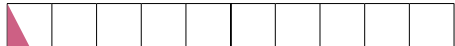



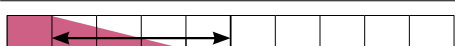
The numbers below are averages from research studies. The people in the studies usually had routine surgery, were a healthy weight and did not have specific health conditions.

You can find out about the research we used here: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risks/evidence.

Your risks might be higher or lower than these numbers. Your anaesthetist will discuss with you the risks that are more likely, or significant, for you.

You can find information about the different types of anaesthesia here: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/resources.






These numbers are out of every 100 people.

What happened?	For how long?	How many? Out of every 100 people (one hundred people)
 Shivering	For 20–30 minutes in the recovery room	 15 did 85 did not
 Nausea (feeling sick)	For 1–24 hours	 About 15 did About 85 did not
 Sore throat	For 24–48 hours	 20–40 did 60–80 did not Depends on the kind of breathing tube used
 Bruising or pain from injections.	Goes away in a few days	 10 did 90 did not
 Minor lip or tongue injury	Heals in a few days	 1–5 did 95–99 did not
 Chest infection More likely for smokers, people with existing medical conditions and people requiring certain types of surgery.	For days or weeks	 2–20 did 80–98 did not
 Becoming confused (delirium) More likely for older patients with existing medical conditions having complex or emergency surgery.	For days, weeks or months	 10–50 did 50–90 did not




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The risks on this page are rare.

These numbers are out of every 10,000 people.

What happened?	For how long?	How many? Out of every 10,000 people (ten thousand people)	
 Damage to teeth	Needs to be seen by a dentist	5 did	9,995 did not
 Blurred vision, eye irritation or pain due to a small scratch or dry eyes.	A few days	About 5 did	About 9,995 did not
 Tingling, numbness, pain or weakness (nerve damage).	Temporary (weeks to months)	1–5 did	9,995–9,999 did not
	Permanent	1 did	9,999 did not
 Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)	Happens quickly Treated immediately	1 did	9,999 did not
 Cardiac arrest, eg heart stopping during surgery	Treated immediately	3 did	9,997 did not

These numbers are out of every 100,000 people.

What happened?	How many? Out of every 100,000 people (one hundred thousand people)
 Woke up for a short time during general anaesthetic (accidental awareness).	5 were 99,995 were not 3–4 in every 100,000 said that it lasted less than five minutes, before surgery or after it had finished About 1 in every 100,000 said that they felt some pain
 Lost their sight (went blind) due to pressure or blood clots affecting the optic nerve.	1 did 99,999 did not
 Died from complications of surgery Died due to cardiac arrest during or just after surgery Died due to the anaesthetic This risk varies greatly. For example, it is higher for certain surgeries, or if people were frail, older or had certain health conditions.	14 did 99,986 did not
	1 did 99,999 did not
	1 did 99,999 did not

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Find out more about these risks in more detail below:

[rcoa.ac.uk/
patientinfo/risk-
leaflets](https://rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risk-leaflets)