

# Your child's anaesthetic at Starship



## What is Anaesthesia (a·nuhs·thee·zee·uh)

Most children are given a **general anaesthetic** when they have an operation. A general anaesthetic is when your child is unconscious during the operation. This means they won't feel anything or know anything about what is happening to them.

## Who is my Anaesthetist?

Your anaesthetist is a doctor who has undergone many years of training to ensure children are safe and comfortable during their operation. You and your child will meet your anaesthetist before their operation to talk about which anaesthetic is best and how to give it. It can be a mix of medicine to swallow, by mask or into a vein.

## What your Anaesthetist needs to know

- Does your child have any health conditions and what do you do to manage them?
- Has your child been unwell / had any sickness in the last two weeks?
- Has anyone in your family had problems having an anaesthetic?
- Has your child had a general anaesthetic before, and what was it like for them?
- We routinely do a urine pregnancy test for females over the age of 12 years who have started their periods and are having major surgery – we will let you know if this is needed.

## What you need to know about eating and drinking

No **food** or **milk** for at least **6 hours** before their operation

**Breast milk** or **infant formula** is okay to have up to **4 hours** before their operation

**Clear fluids** are encouraged up to **1 hour** before their operation

**Clear fluids** are liquids you can see through if you hold them up to the light - like **water**, **clear juice**, **cordial**, **paedialyte**. **Do not give juice with pulp, milk-based products or jelly.**

**Following these instructions is important.** It will help prevent your child vomiting during their anaesthetic which can lead to serious complications. If you do not follow these instructions, your child's operation might be cancelled or delayed for their safety.

**It is a good idea to give your child a drink of water or clear fluid just before leaving home to go to the hospital.**

## Pain relief

Our goal is for your child to be as comfortable as possible. Depending on the type of operation, different ways of relieving pain are available. We will explain these to you before your child's procedure and again before you go home.

**Visit our website [starship.org.nz](http://starship.org.nz) for more helpful information**

# Getting your child ready for their operation

Start preparing younger children 1-2 days before their operation, and older children 1-2 weeks before.

It is helpful to use **'who'**, **'what'**, **'where'** and **'why'** when you are talking with them. For example, *'the doctor is going to help you to have a magic sleep in the hospital tomorrow. You are going to be safe. I will be with you before and after your operation'*.

Be honest and encourage your child to ask questions. Write down anything they or you are worried about and ask the anaesthetist, surgeon or nurse before their operation. It will comfort your child if you are calm and confident.

When you get to the hospital you will meet a play specialist. They can use 'hospital play' to help your child feel more at home. Children have powerful imaginations, and we can use this to direct their attention to something fun. Bring along toys or books for your child and something for yourself to do while you are waiting in hospital.

Deep breathing exercises can help your child feel less anxious. When a child is nervous, their heart rate goes up and they may breathe faster than normal. Deep breathing exercises like belly breathing or blowing bubbles can slow the heart rate and help your child to feel calm.

## Teenagers

It helps to involve teenagers in planning, discussions and decision-making about their operation. Give them privacy when they need it. There is a lot of information online so your support during their online research can be very important.

## Children with Autism, ADHD and those needing special care

You know your child best, and how they interact and communicate with others. Write down a list of things you think we should know, like how they behave when they are stressed, what triggers their stress and the best ways to calm them.

# Can I be with my child while they have the anaesthetic?

Your anaesthetist will talk about this with you. One parent may be able to go into the operating theatre with your child at the start of their procedure. Once your child's anaesthetic has started, you will have to leave and return to the waiting area. If your child is younger than nine months old, is very sick or their operation is urgent, you may not be able to go into the operating theatre.

**No photos or videos are allowed in the operating theatre.**

# What happens after the operation?

After their operation, your child will go to the **Post Anaesthesia Care Unit** (also called PACU or the recovery room). The nurses will work with the anaesthetist and surgeon to make sure your child is comfortable and recovers safely from their anaesthetic. Sometimes children can be restless when they are not fully awake and might need some extra medicines to help them. The PACU nurse will let you know when your child is awake and ready for you to see them.

# Going home

Most operations are 'day stay' which means your child can go home on the same day. It takes several hours to prepare your child for surgery and for them to recover from the anaesthetic. Please allow for this when planning your day. Before you leave hospital we will give you a plan for any follow-up appointments, prescriptions for medicines and how to use them, and any other advice for your child's recovery.

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