

Patient Information Leaflet

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR ANAESTHETIC

Shivering

Department of Anaesthesia

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Shivering is a common problem after a general or a regional anaesthetic like a spinal or an epidural.

What causes it?

Most shivering after an operation is due to a fall in your core body temperature. This occurs because parts of your body are exposed to a cool environment during surgery. Anaesthetic drugs and gases also contribute by reducing your ability to regulate your own temperature while epidural and spinal anaesthetics cause heat loss by dilating blood vessels in the skin.

What is done to prevent it?

You need to keep yourself warm before your operation. Bringing a dressing gown and warm slippers from home always helps. Beside warm blankets, your anaesthetist and recovery nurses may use other ways to keep you warm. These include heating intravenous fluids and heated mattresses and blankets.

How often does shivering occur?

Shivering following a general anaesthetic occurs in up to 1 in 4 patients. The risk is higher in younger patients, longer operations and orthopaedic surgery.

What can be done if shivering occurs?

Your temperature will be monitored during your operation and in the recovery room. If you are cold or shivering, a warming blanket will be provided to warm you up again and this is usually all that is needed. Some drugs can also be used to control shivering, but are not 100% effective. You might need oxygen by face mask as shivering increases your body's requirement for oxygen.

Shivering will stop on its own and although distressing it is not dangerous.

This leaflet can be made available in alternative languages/formats on request.

For further advice please telephone

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