



Information for
patients and
carers

**Breastfeeding after General
Anaesthesia or Sedation**

Who is this advice for?

Those who require an operation and are currently feeding their infant with their own milk.



General anaesthetic

A general anaesthetic is where an anaesthetist gives you medication that sends you to sleep so that an operation or procedure can take place. There is often anxiety from both mothers and healthcare providers that drugs given during anaesthesia may pass to your baby via breastmilk and cause harm. This guide aims to address concerns so that you feel confident to have surgery where necessary and know that it is not necessary to stop feeding baby with your own milk or unnecessarily discard breast milk.

Some anaesthetics and pain killing drugs can pass from you to your baby in your milk. It is important to let the anaesthetist know that you are feeding when they come to speak to you before your operation. This will allow them to plan the most appropriate and safest anaesthetic and pain-relieving drugs for you and your baby.

Drugs during general anaesthesia

Anaesthetic medications

These are the medications that ensure you are asleep. These medicines are very short-acting. At the end of the operation, these are turned off and you gradually wake up. As they are very short-acting, you tend to recover from their effects very quickly. This also means that by the time you are awake enough to feed your baby the levels in your body will be very low and will not pass to your baby in your milk. However, you should have somebody with you just in case you are still drowsy enough to fall asleep during feeding.

Painkillers

Painkillers vary depending on the nature of surgery. There are “simple” painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, which might be used during and after surgery. These should not have any effect for a breast-fed baby. Stronger painkillers include opiates such as morphine and fentanyl. These are often given during your operation and are one of the reasons that you may be drowsy or queasy when you wake up. Some of the medicine can cross into your milk but it is only at high doses and continued use that they can cause your baby to be drowsy. If you have these stronger medications you should have someone with you while feeding in case you become and you must avoid co-sleeping with your baby. You will be given anti-sickness medication by the anaesthetist, which again should not affect your baby.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are sometimes given during or after surgery. In general, these are safe as only a small amount of the drug is likely to cross into your milk. Occasionally this may cause your baby to have runny poos. Any concerns regarding the above medicines can be discussed further with your anaesthetist.

Medicines after your operation

You may be given painkillers after your operation. “Simple” painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen are safe to use when feeding your baby with your own milk. Stronger opiate drugs like morphine can be used if necessary but it is recommended that this is at lowest dose practical and for only short courses. Depending on the operation, you may require daily injections (usually into the skin on your tummy) to reduce the risk of blood clots after your procedure. These are safe when feeding your baby.

Medicines to avoid

Codeine phosphate is a medium-strength painkiller that can have a serious effect on babies if used whilst breastfeeding. Current evidence does not recommend you use codeine phosphate if you are feeding your baby with your own milk. Codeine can be found in both medicines from the community pharmacy and hospital e.g., Co-codamol, Solpadeine, Solpadol, Zapain. At Lancashire Teaching Hospitals we use dihydrocodeine instead of codeine/Co-codamol. Dihydrocodeine is considered safe. **Aspirin** should be avoided, unless you are told by your doctor that the benefit outweighs the risks. If buying painkillers over the counter, explain you are breastfeeding and ask your pharmacist for advice.

How long will it take for the anaesthetic to wear off?

Anaesthetic drugs will remain in your body for around 24 hours, possibly longer for bigger operations. During this time you should not drive a car, operate machinery or ride a bike. Most people will feel back to normal within a few hours of waking from the anaesthetic. For many operations, you may be able to go home later the same day, provided you have a responsible adult who can take you home and stay with you. This is known as day surgery. You will be told if this is a possibility for you. If you are taking strong painkillers, you need to be aware that these can make you feel drowsy and affect your ability to safely co-sleep (sleeping with baby), drive and perform other tasks. You will need to take this into consideration when recovering from surgery where these are needed and ensure you have some extra support for this time.

Alternatives to general anaesthesia

If your operation is not urgent, it may be possible to postpone surgery until your baby is older or you are no longer feeding with your own milk. This is a discussion that you could have with your surgeon. If surgery is to proceed, there are alternative forms of anaesthesia, such as having a local anaesthetic, that do not involve going to sleep. These may not be suitable for all procedures, therefore a discussion with your surgeon and anaesthetist may be required.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Department of anaesthesia: **01772 522555**

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/day-surgery/>

[https://www.labourpains.com/assets/_managed/cms/files/New%20Leaflets/Anaesthesia in breastfeeding mothers V5.pdf](https://www.labourpains.com/assets/_managed/cms/files/New%20Leaflets/Anaesthesia%20in%20breastfeeding%20mothers%20V5.pdf)

<https://associationofanaesthetists-publications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/anae.15179>

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

Gujarati:

આ માહિતીને સમજવામાં સહાયતા જોઈતી હોય તો કૃપા કરીને પૂછો. આ માહિતી મોટા છપાણામાં અને અન્ય ભાષામાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરી શકાય છે.

Romanian:

Vă rugăm să întrebați dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru înțelegerea acestor informații. Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în format mare și în alte limbi."

Polish:

Poinformuj nas, jeśli potrzebna jest ci pomoc w zrozumieniu tych informacji. Informacje te można również udostępnić dużym drukiem oraz w innych językach

Punjabi:

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

Urdu:

دوسری زبانوں اور بڑی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے لیے مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو
پوچھنا جس سے آپ کو مدد ملے گی۔ یہ معلومات براہ راست ہو سکتے ہیں۔

Arabic:

مطبوعة بأحرف كبيرة وبلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات يُرجى أن تطلب
أخرى يمكن توفير هذه المعلومات

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Division: Surgery

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