

What happens after the treatment?

- ◆ You will be moved to a recovery area where a nurse will closely monitor your pulse and blood pressure until you are fully awake and able to return to your room or home.
- ◆ You may experience some confusion after waking from the anaesthetic. You may also experience nausea, muscular aches or headaches, but these are usually not severe and disappear after a few hours.
- ◆ At the end of your treatment series, your doctor will discuss any further care required with you. Often this involves follow-up use of medications. In some cases, they may recommend a course of maintenance ECT to maintain improvement.

What are the benefits of the treatment?

- ◆ Potential recovery from the symptoms of the illness ECT was prescribed to treat. As with many forms of medical treatment, not all patients respond equally well. Some recover quickly; others seem to recover but then symptoms recur requiring further treatments; and others may not respond at all to the treatment.
- ◆ ECT has proven to be a safe and effective treatment for some illnesses when it is given according to modern standards of anaesthetic and psychiatric practice.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS INVOLVED WITH ECT BEFORE CONSENTING TO THE TREATMENT.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT EITHER YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE.

Providence
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Adapted from Centre for Addiction
and Mental Health

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Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

What you need to know

- ◆ Your doctor has recommended Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) as the most effective treatment for you at this time.
- ◆ This booklet provides answers to some of the questions you may have about ECT when deciding your consent to the treatment.
- ◆ It is important for you to fully understand what is involved with ECT. Ask your doctor or nurse if you require further information.

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Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

ECT is a painless, safe, and effective treatment for some forms of mental illnesses. It is a physical therapy in which a patient under general anaesthetic will have an electrical current passed through their brain. It is believed that the treatment corrects some of the biochemical changes in the brain which accompany some mental illnesses. Patients who have agreed to ECT are required to sign a consent form. However, consent may be withdrawn at any time during the treatment.

ECT treatment

How many treatments would I have to have?

- ◆ The number of treatments varies but it's usually between 8 to 12 or more.
- ◆ The number of treatments cannot be predicted ahead of time.
- ◆ Your doctor will determine the number of treatments you require according to the degree of improvement of your illness.

Where and when are treatments given?

- ◆ Treatments are usually given three times a week - Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- ◆ Treatments are given by trained professionals at Mental Health Services in the ECT Clinic on the second floor of the Admissions Building.

How long will a treatment last?

- ◆ Each treatment lasts approximately 10 minutes.

Will it be painful?

- ◆ No, each treatment is given while you are asleep under general anaesthesia.

What happens during a treatment?

- ◆ Two discs or electrodes are placed on the surface of your scalp according to your doctor's orders - either both on one side of your head (unilateral ECT) or one on each side of your head (bilateral ECT).
- ◆ You will be given an intravenous line.
- ◆ You will be given a short-acting general anaesthetic.
- ◆ Once you are asleep you will be given a muscle relaxant.
- ◆ When you are completely asleep and your muscles are relaxed, a small controlled electric current is passed between the two electrodes and through part of your brain. The electrical stimulation to your brain causes a convulsion or seizure usually lasting from 20 to 90 seconds. The convulsion is well controlled by the muscle relaxant you were given.

What are the risks involved?

- ◆ Memory loss is the most common side effect of ECT. Recovery from that memory loss begins a few weeks after treatment and is usually complete after six months. There may be some difficulty learning and remembering new information for a short period after treatment. There may be a permanent loss of memory for details of some events, particularly those which occurred before or during the weeks treatment was given. However, very few patients report severe memory problems that last for months or years.
- ◆ There is always a certain element of risk when given a general anaesthesia. Although very rare, there is a risk of death (between two and four reported for every 100,000 treatments).
- ◆ Also rare with modern ECT are bone fractures, broken teeth or other dental injury, or spontaneous seizures which may occur some time after the treatment.