



Respiratory Care WA

Asthma | COPD | Respiratory Health



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Anaesthetics and Asthma

This information sheet is for people with asthma. It describes measures people with asthma can take to avoid problems during surgery.

Surgery can be worrying for many people, but for people who have asthma the concerns are often greater. However, if the doctor, anaesthetist and surgeon are aware, appropriate measures can be taken and there should not be any problems.

The vast majority of medications used for general and local anaesthetics are quite safe when used in patients with asthma.

In some people, particularly those with unstable asthma, certain surgical procedures can aggravate asthma or induce coughing spasms. If this happens under anaesthetic your anaesthetist should be able to assist as needed. To reduce the risk of wheeze or coughing during and after the anaesthetic make sure that your asthma is well controlled before surgery.

Even with low lung function, general anaesthetics can usually be administered safely, although special care must be taken during and after the operation. If an extremely low lung function is evident and clinically significant, the doctor and the anaesthetist may suggest an alternative to a general anaesthetic. These may include a local or a spinal anaesthetic.

Some useful tips if you are having an anaesthetic:

- During the month before the operation, ensure your asthma is as well controlled as possible through optimal use of medication;
- Avoid exposure to trigger factors;
- Smoking and inhaling other people's cigarette smoke are common trigger factors.
- Make a real effort to QUIT before the procedure and during the recovery phase, call the **Quitline** on **131 848** for help;
- Make sure your surgeon and anaesthetist have your full medical record; and
- Raise any questions with your doctor and the anaesthetist before the operation. They handle many patients with asthma and will understand any concerns and will be able to answer any questions.

Asthma should not present any problems if you making sure that your doctor and anaesthetist know about your asthma and that it is well controlled before the surgery.