



**Southern Health**  
NHS Foundation Trust

## **Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT)**

This booklet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT). You may want to know what ECT is, why it's used, what it's like to have ECT and what the side effects and benefits may be. It should be read along with the Royal College of Psychiatrist information leaflet on ECT.

This booklet explains how to prepare for ECT treatment; what the treatment involves and what to expect after your treatment has finished.

If you or your relatives or carers have any questions or concerns, please contact us. We can also arrange for you to visit the ECT department before your first treatment.

Most people who have ECT prescribed for them suffer from severe depression, or more rarely, some other related mental health disorder. Although there is medication to help with depression and other mental illness, some people do not recover completely and others take a long time to recover. ECT is often used for these patients. In some cases of depression ECT may be the best choice of treatment.

## What is ECT?

Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) is a physical treatment carried out under a general anaesthetic. An electrical current is passed across the brain for a few seconds to produce a small fit – hence the name, electro-convulsive. This produces an artificial fit which affects the entire brain, including the parts that control thinking, mood, appetite and sleep. There are theories to explain how ECT works but the truth is that nobody knows for sure. What we do know is that it can be a very effective treatment for some people.

A machine is used to precisely control the amount of current used. This ensures the current is as low as possible. ECT is only administered by a competent practitioner or by a trainee under the supervision of a competent practitioner. ECT does not have an impact on your intelligence, judgements or your ability to learn new information.

## How ECT might help you

It may be helpful if you:

- have not improved with anti-depressant medication
- can't take anti-depressant drugs because of the side effects
- have responded well to ECT in the past
- feel so overwhelmed by your depression it's difficult for you to carry out your daily activities

## Are there any side-effects?

ECT is one of the safest medical treatments given under general anaesthetic. ECT involves several treatments spread over a few weeks. As with any treatment, ECT can cause a number of side effects. Some of these are mild and some are more severe. The risk of any problems developing is one in 50,000 treatments. Your psychiatrist or ECT nurse will be able to fully discuss this likelihood with you.

## Possible side effects

- Feeling confused just after waking from treatment. This normally clears within an hour or so
- Feeling sick after treatment. Your anaesthetist can give you some medication to help with this

### Less common side-effects:

- Headache or aching muscles after treatment. Your ECT nurse will let you know how to avoid these side-effects
- Some temporary memory loss about events, telephone numbers etc. This memory loss normally goes away in a few days or weeks, although some patients experience some loss of memory for a few months.

## How often and many times is ECT given?

ECT is given twice per week, often on a Monday and Thursday, or Tuesday and Friday. Whilst it is impossible to predict how many treatments an individual will need, they are normally prescribed in blocks of 12. Some people will need more some will need less. We would hope after two or three treatments your family or friends would notice a slight improvement and after four or five treatments you will also notice some change. It is our experience that others will notice before you do.

## Deciding to have (or not to have) ECT

Like any significant treatment in medicine or surgery, you will be asked to give consent, or permission for the ECT to be done. The doctor will explain their reasons for suggesting ECT, the possible benefits and any side-effects. If you decide to go ahead, you then sign a consent form. It is a record that ECT has been explained to you, you understand what is going to happen, and you give your consent to it. However, you can withdraw your consent at any point, even before the first treatment. In some very urgent situations the rules around consent do not apply the Mental Health Act allows ECT to be given if the treatment given is preventing deterioration or lifesaving.

## Preparing for your treatment

The night before ECT: please don't eat or drink anything from midnight. This is because you will have a general anaesthetic. Please check with staff if you are taking morning medication. If you do take medication, it's fine to take any tablets with a very small amount of water. You can wear your usual clothes to the treatment, but they should be reasonably loose fitting.

Please don't wear any jewellery, make up or hair grips/clips. If you wear contact lenses or dentures or if you have any loose teeth, caps or crowns please let staff know.

If you are an inpatient, a nurse from your ward will take you to the clinic and remain with you throughout your treatment. If you're an outpatient, you'll need a responsible adult to collect you after your treatment and to stay with you for 24 hours. This is because the effects of the general anaesthetic.

### **There will be five main parts to your treatment:**

## Arrival/waiting area

Please let a member of staff know when you arrive-and take a seat in the waiting area. You'll be seen as quickly as possible, but please be aware that there may be occasions when another patient is seen as a priority for clinical reasons. A friend or relative can wait with you, but we'd ask that you're accompanied by one adult only.

## Pre-treatment assessment

Before your treatment, you'll meet one of the nursing team for an assessment. The nurse will check you're well enough to have the treatment, and will take your blood pressure, check your heart rate and take your temperature. You'll also be fitted with a hospital wristband. If you've had ECT treatment recently, the nurse will ask about your progress and how you've been feeling. You can also ask questions or raise any concerns.

A friend or relative can be with you for the assessment if this would be helpful. Like any significant treatment in medicine or surgery, you will be asked confirm your consent, or permission for the ECT to be done. However, you can withdraw your consent at any point, even before the first treatment.

## Treatment

You'll then be invited into the treatment room, a friend or relative can accompany you while you have your anaesthetic.

There will be several members of the ECT team in the room- an anaesthetist, psychiatrist, operating department practitioner and a nurse. As we are teaching trust there will sometimes be students present, however it is your choice as to whether you agree to them following you through your treatment on that particular day or not.

You'll be asked to remove your shoes, any glasses, contact lenses and dentures if you wear them. You'll then be asked to lie on the bed and the team will prepare you for your treatment. They'll connect several monitors for checks during your treatment including an EEG machine, which involves attaching electrodes-small stickers-to your head and chest. Your heart rate and oxygen levels will also be monitored by a small clip on your finger, and your blood pressure by a cuff around your leg or arm. These monitors are routine and do not hurt in any way.

When you're ready, the anaesthetist will give you an anaesthetic and a muscle relaxant. This will be done using a small cannula in the back of your hand

or arm. You'll feel a sharp scratch, but this will be over quickly.

You'll then fall asleep quickly, and when you are safely under the anaesthetic, your treatment will be given.

ECT treatment is given by a psychiatrist, when under the anaesthetic a short fit will be induced that will last between ten seconds and up to a minute. You'll usually be in the treatment room between ten and fifteen minutes.

## Recovery

After your treatment, and while you're still under the anaesthetic, you'll be moved to the recovery area. You'll be given oxygen and monitored closely by a nurse until you come round from the anaesthetic safely.

When you no longer need oxygen to help with your breathing, you'll be moved to the second recovery area where a nurse will continue to monitor you. You'll probably feel a bit disorientated and sleepy whilst the anaesthetic is wearing off. You'll be able to lie comfortably until you are ready and able to get up. For most people, recovery takes about 20 minutes.

## Refreshments and further recovery

When you're ready to get up, you'll be invited through to the beverage area, offered a seat, a hot or cold drink and something to eat. You'll be given time to come around and to relax and talk with staff. When you're ready, a nurse will remove the small needle in your arm that was used for the anaesthetic. A nurse will also run through a short checklist to ensure that you're ready and well enough to leave the department. When you are well enough, you'll be discharged. If you're an outpatient you can make your way home with an accompanying adult. If you're an inpatient, you'll be escorted back to the ward by a member of staff.

## Before and after your treatment

**Important things to remember:**

Some people wake up with no side effects at all and simply feel relaxed. Others may feel slightly confused; this is common after a general anaesthetic and generally lasts for a short period of time.

You'll need to be accompanied home by a responsible adult, and ensure that a responsible adult is with you for 24 hours after the treatment

Most people who are ill enough for

ECT will be unfit to drive and you should discuss with your doctor if you feel well enough to resume driving after you have finished your course of ECT. You shouldn't drive for at least 48 hours after the treatment. You should also check what advice your vehicle insurance provides with regards to cover following a general anaesthetic.

You should avoid alcohol and smoking for at least 24 hours. Alcohol can increase drowsiness and smoking in combination with anaesthetic can make you more prone to chest infections. You should avoid signing any legal documents or making any formal agreements for at least 24 hours after treatment.

If you, or a relative or carer has concerns about how you're feeling after your treatment please let someone know.

## Inpatients-contact a member of ward staff

Outpatients-contact your care co-ordinator at your community mental health team in the first instance. If you have concerns outside of office hours please contact your GP surgery. Between treatments you will be regularly reviewed by the team to ensure your treatment is still appropriate and effective.

## How do I know if ECT is done properly?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has set up the ECT Accreditation Service (ECTAS) to provide an independent assessment of the quality of ECT services. ECTAS sets very high standards for ECT, and visits all the ECT units who have registered with it. The visiting team involves psychiatrists, anaesthetists', and nurses. It publishes the results of its findings and also provides a forum for sharing best clinical practice. Membership of ECTAS is not compulsory, but every ECT unit in Southern Health has been accredited

A list of accredited sites is available on the Royal College of Psychiatrists' website.

## Complaints

If you would like to make a complaint, please inform a member of the team, who will inform the Lead Nurse. The Lead Nurse will ensure that the Trust Complaints Policy and Procedures are followed in dealing with your concern.

## Your feedback about the service

As a service, we value your feedback. At the end of your treatment period, we will send you a questionnaire in the post asking

you to evaluate the quality of the service you have received from the team. Any feedback that you give will be used to make service improvements in the future. Staff will also be happy to talk with you about any suggestions or comments that you have at any time.

## Advice

The Complaints and Patient Experience Team will provide service users, carers and relatives with confidential and impartial on-the-spot advice and support about the care you, a relative or someone that you care for are receiving from the Trust.

The Complaints and Patient Experience Team acts independently when advising you, and can where appropriate liaise with staff, managers, and relevant organisations to find solutions to any problems or difficulties you are experiencing.

The team is available Monday-Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm and can be contacted in the following ways:

**Tel:** 02382 311200

**Email:** [shft.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:shft.patientexperience@nhs.net)

### Address:

FREEPOST, RSJL-JXSX-ATUE  
Complaints and Patient Experience Team  
7 Sterne Road, Tatchbury Mount  
Calmore Southampton  
SO40 2RZ

ECT services in Southern Health are held in the following locations. As a trust we are unable to guarantee a space in the nearest clinic will be available to you although we will try to accommodate your wishes.

### **Antelope House**

Tuesday and Friday  
8:30am-12:30pm

Brinton's Terrace  
Southampton  
SO14 OYG

023 8083 5500

### **Parklands**

Monday and Friday  
8:30am-12:30pm

Aldermaston Road  
Basingstoke  
RG24 9RH

01256 817 718

**This leaflet is to supplement the information given to you by your referring consultant.**

If you have any queries please contact the ECT team or you can arrange a visit before you make a decision.

**This information is available in other formats and languages including large print, braille and audio.**

**Please speak to a member of the team.**



Southern Health



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