

Anaesthesia and Fasting

Fasting before an anaesthetic: nothing to eat or drink for the time advised.

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On the day of surgery, two things matter most for your safety: the type of anaesthetic you have, and how strictly you follow the fasting instructions you were given.

Why we ask you to fast

A general anaesthetic relaxes the muscles that normally stop stomach contents from coming back up the throat. If your stomach is full, that material can spill into your lungs while you are unconscious, which is serious. Fasting empties the stomach so this cannot happen.

The standard rules are:

- **No food or milk for 6 hours** before your scheduled arrival time. This includes lollies, chewing gum, and tea or coffee with milk.
- **Clear fluids are allowed up to 2 hours before** – water, black tea, black coffee, apple juice, clear cordial. Sip, don't gulp.
- **Stop all clear fluids 2 hours before arrival.**

If you have your normal blood-pressure or epilepsy tablets in the morning, take them with a small sip of water unless your anaesthetist has told you otherwise. Diabetic medications and blood thinners are different – follow the specific written advice you were given.

Types of anaesthesia we use

Most upper-limb surgery is done under one of three approaches, sometimes combined:

- **General anaesthetic** – you are fully asleep. The anaesthetist puts you to sleep through a small drip in the back of your hand and looks after you the whole time.

- **Regional block** – local anaesthetic is injected around the nerves in your neck or armpit, numbing the whole arm for several hours. You may also be sedated so you sleep through the surgery, but you are not on a ventilator.
- **Local anaesthetic** – small operations (like a trigger-finger release) can often be done with the area numbed and you fully awake, sometimes with light sedation.

Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you on the day. The choice depends on the operation, your general health, and what you prefer.

What to expect on the day

You'll arrive 1–2 hours before your scheduled theatre time. A nurse will check your fasting, place a drip, and go through a final consent form. The anaesthetist will see you in person before you go to theatre.

After surgery you'll wake up in the recovery area. If you had a regional block, your arm will feel heavy and numb – this is normal and lasts 8–24 hours. **Protect a numb arm** – keep it in the sling, don't lean on it, and keep it warm. Sensation comes back gradually, often with some pins and needles.

Nausea, drowsiness, and a sore throat (from the breathing tube) are common in the first few hours. Drink slowly, eat lightly, and rest.

Call us if

- You are unsure about your medications on the morning of surgery
- You become unwell (cold, fever, stomach bug) in the days before
- You accidentally ate or drank inside the fasting window – tell us at check-in, don't just hope it's fine