

Anaesthesia for eye surgery

Eye surgery can be performed under eye block, topical anaesthesia or general anaesthesia.

The choice of anaesthesia depends on the patient, type of surgery and the preference of the eye surgeon and patient.

EYE BLOCKS

Eye blocks are commonly used for eye surgery and involve one or two injections of local anaesthetic around the eye.

Once the local anaesthetic drug begins to work, usually in around 10 minutes, the patient will not be able to see out of the eye or move it and surgery may begin.

After the surgery, the eye is covered with a patch and is reviewed the next day.

Reaction to local anaesthetic drugs is rare; however, it is not uncommon for the white part of the eye, the conjunctiva, to become swollen and red. The risks of the block include eye perforation (less than 1 per cent) and bleeding into the eye (less than 1 per cent).

TOPICAL ANAESTHESIA

Topical anaesthesia is commonly used in patients who are unable to have an eye block or in rare cases where the eye block fails to provide adequate anaesthesia and analgesia.

Cataract surgery can be performed under topical anaesthesia using local anaesthetic eye drops, although this does not result in the same surgical operating conditions that can be achieved with an eye block.

From a medical point of view, the patient should be able to lie flat. Patients with significant heart failure or respiratory disease may not be able to do so.

GENERAL ANAESTHESIA

General anaesthesia involves the patient being put into a medication-induced state which, when deep enough, means that the patient will not respond to pain and includes changes in breathing and circulation.

Under general anaesthetic, a patient is in a state of carefully controlled unconsciousness.

BEFORE THE OPERATION

It is important that you speak to your doctor about whether you should stop eating and drinking before your anaesthetic.

The anaesthetist will also need information such as:

- Any recent coughs, colds or fevers.
- Any previous anaesthetics or family problems with anaesthesia.
- Abnormal reactions or allergies to drugs.
- Any history of asthma, bronchitis, heart problems or other medical problems.
- Any medications you may be taking.