

Anaesthetics and asthma

FACT SHEET prepared by the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ

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 that you have asthma, appropriate measures can be taken and there should not be any problems.

How safe is it for me to have an anaesthetic if I have asthma?

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 make asthma worse or induce coughing spasms. If this happens under anaesthetic your anaesthetist will be able to manage it. To reduce the risk of wheeze or coughing during and after the anaesthetic your asthma needs to be well controlled before surgery.

Even if you have low lung function, general anaesthetics can usually be administered safely, although special care must be taken during and after the operation. However, your 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. Use your medication as directed, especially your preventer and symptom controller, so that you are free of symptoms.
- Avoid exposure to trigger factors.
- Smoking is a major trigger factor. Make a real effort to QUIT before the procedure and during the recovery phase.
- Raise any questions with your surgeon and the anaesthetist before the operation. They operate on and anaesthetise many patients with asthma and will understand your concerns and will be able to answer your questions.
- Making sure that your surgeon and anaesthetist know you have asthma and ensuring that it is well controlled before the surgery, your asthma should not present any problems.

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ can help you

Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice.

Check out our comprehensive website at asthmaandrespiratory.org.nz.