



Risks of having an anaesthetic.

Anaesthesia has made modern surgery possible. Sophisticated operations can be offered with a high degree of comfort and safety. However, there are risks associated with having an anaesthetic. These may be weighed up against the likely benefits of the operation.

Everyone varies in the risks they are willing to take. Your anaesthetist will describe the risk to you, but only you can decide how much the risk affects your plan to have the operation you would like.

Thinking about risk

The risk to you as an individual depends on:

- whether you have any other illness
- personal factors such as whether you smoke or are overweight
- whether the operation is complicated, long, or done as an emergency.

To understand the risk fully you need to know:

- how likely it is to happen
- how serious it could be
- how it can be treated if it happens.

The anaesthetist can also advise you whether there are any anaesthetic techniques that will reduce those risks.

Side effects and complications

Anaesthetic risks can be described as side effects or complications. These words are somewhat interchangeable, but are generally used in different circumstances, as shown below.

Side effects are the effects of drugs or treatments which are unwanted but are generally predictable and expected. For example, sickness is a side effect of a general anaesthetic, although steps are taken to prevent it.

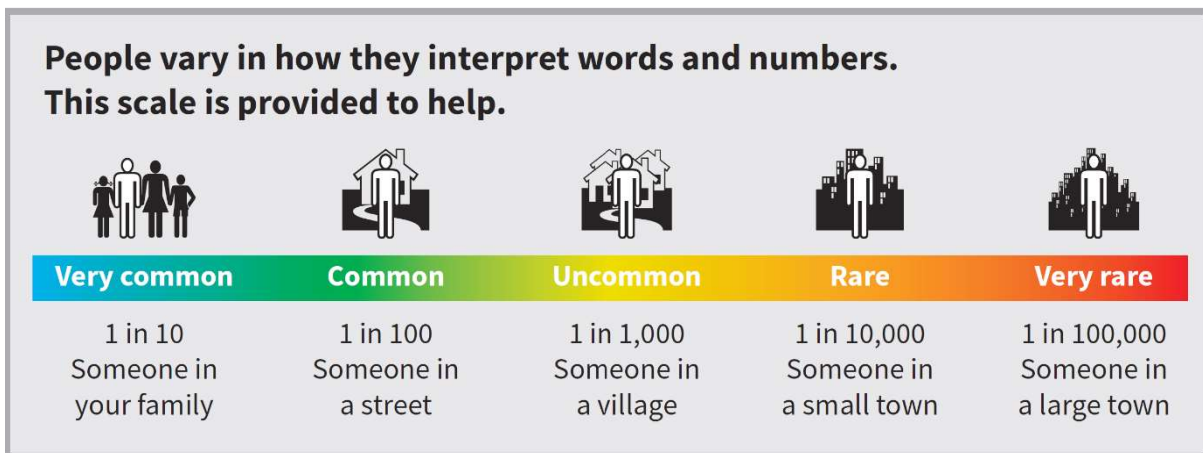


Complications are unwanted and unexpected events due to a treatment. However, they are recognised as events that can happen. An example is a severe allergic reaction to a drug, or damage to your teeth when inserting a breathing tube. Anaesthesiologists are trained to prevent complications and to treat them if they happen.

Index of side effects and complications

This index lists possible side effects and complications according to how likely they are to happen.

This chart shows what is meant in this website when a risk is described in words.



For example, if something is 'very common' it means that about 1 in 10 people will experience it. It also means it will not happen to about 9 out of 10 people.

| Common complications (1-10%) Minimal treatment usually required | Rare complications (<1:1000) May require further treatment | Very rare complications (1:10000-200000) Often serious with long term sequelae | Brain damage or death (<1:250000) |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea and Vomiting Sore throat Shivering or feeling cold Headache Dizziness Itching Pain during drug injection Swelling/bruising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Injuries to teeth, crowns, tongue, lips, mouth Hoarseness, vocal cord damage Muscle pains Difficulty urinating Difficulty breathing Visual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eye injuries Nerve injuries causing paralysis Lung infection Awareness Bleeding Stroke Allergic reactions Unexpected drug reactions Inherited | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to any other complication getting more severe Heart attacks Emboli (clots) Lack of oxygen |



| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| at drip site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion/memory loss (esp in elderly) | disturbances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening of underlying medical condition • Side effects of post op medications | reactions to drugs (Malignant hyperthermia, Scoline apnoea, porphyria) | |
|--|--|---|--|

| Procedure | Complication |
|--|--|
| Intravenous line | Pain, swelling, repeated insertions, inflammation, infection |
| Central Line for specialised monitoring/therapy | Pain, swelling, bleeding, inflammation, infection, repeated insertions, puncture of lung, artery or nerve. |
| Arterial Line for specialised monitoring | Pain, swelling, bleeding, inflammation, infection, repeated insertions, loss of blood flow to the hand leading to death of fingers |
| Airway management | Damage to lips, teeth, tongue, palate, throat, vocal cords, hoarseness, inhalation of stomach contents (aspiration), pneumonia, obstruction of breathing, failure to manage the airway which may require an emergency operative procedure. |
| Nerve block, spinal, or epidural injection | Nerve damage, paralysis, backache, headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, shortness of breath, pain, bleeding, inadequate pain control. |