

Caring for someone recovering from a general anaesthetic or sedation

You have been asked to take a relative or friend home and look after them after they have had sedation or a procedure under general anaesthetic. This leaflet gives you general information about what they should and should not do while they recover and what you should expect, which should help you to plan ahead.

What should I expect?

The sedation medicine or anaesthetic can make some patients slightly confused and unsteady after their treatment. Importantly, it can affect their judgement, so that they may not be able to think clearly. This may last for up to 24 hours, so until the next day after the procedure. In older and frail patients the symptoms can last longer and be more severe. You should keep a careful eye on them during this time. It's helpful to think about how they will manage when they come home from the hospital. For example, some may find it helpful to make a bed on the ground floor or to have ready-to-eat food in the fridge and freezer.

When can I collect my friend or relative?

To collect and look after someone who is recovering from a procedure, you should be a responsible adult (18 years and over). Staff in the hospital will allow them to go home only when they have recovered well from the procedure and you are there to collect them. Patients should not drive for 24 hours after a general anaesthetic or sedation, so you should take them home by car or taxi. Public transport is not recommended if possible.

Staff will not be able to give you an exact discharge time because some people take longer than others to recover after an anaesthetic, sedation or surgery. However, you will be given an approximate time or a number to call. The nurse will also take your phone number to contact you. If they are not able to walk, a wheelchair should be provided to enable them to go safely to your transport.

Will I be told what I need to do?

The doctors will give written instructions specific to your friend or relative, which should include:

- what to expect when they go home
- instructions about eating, drinking and taking their normal medication after the procedure
- anything of concern to look out for and a number to contact at the hospital if you or they have any questions or if they do not feel well
- things they can and cannot do after their procedure
- information about any additional medication that they may need to take, such as pain relief
- information about washing and care of wounds. You should read these instructions with your friend or relative and help ensure that they are followed.
- if you have any questions at the time, ask the healthcare professional.

What should my friend or relative do at home?

This will depend on the type of procedure they have had and the instructions from the hospital. In general, they should:

- get plenty of rest to help them recover
- not walk unaided if they are unsteady, and ideally avoid stairs
- carefully follow instructions from the hospital about taking their usual medication and any additional pain relief
- follow the instructions that they have been given by the hospital about eating, drinking and washing.

What should they not do?

They may not be able to think clearly and their judgement may be affected for up to 24 hours after an anaesthetic or sedation. During this time, they should:

- not be responsible for children or other people in their care
- not drive a vehicle or ride a bicycle or scooter
- not cook, use a kettle or operate any machinery
- not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs
- not make any important decisions, even if they think that they feel okay
- not sign any legal documents
- avoid posting on social media/public forums
- not do online shopping.

If you are concerned about their condition and cannot find the hospital contact number, you can call their GP, ring 111 or take them to your local accident and emergency department.

Disclaimer

We try very hard to keep the information in this leaflet accurate and up to date, but we cannot guarantee this. We don't expect this general information to cover all the questions that you might have or to deal with everything that might be important to you. You should discuss your choices and any worries that you have with your medical team, using this leaflet as a guide. This leaflet on its own should not be treated as advice. It cannot be used for any commercial or business purpose. For full details, please see our website:

rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/resources#disclaimer.

Information for healthcare professionals on printing this leaflet

Please consider the visual impairments of patients when printing or photocopying this leaflet. Photocopies of photocopies are discouraged because these tend to be low-quality prints and can be very difficult for patients to read. Please also make sure that you use the latest version of this leaflet, which is available on the RCoA website.

Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you're a patient or carer, we'd love to hear from you. Please complete this short survey at: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/caring-recovering-from-ga#tell-us or you can scan the QR code below with your mobile.

If you have any general comments, please email them to: patientinformation@rcoa.ac.uk.

Your feedback helps us understand who is using our information, how useful it is and how our resources have helped you. Thank you.



Royal College of Anaesthetists

Churchill House, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG

rcoa.ac.uk



Third Edition, March 2025

This leaflet will be reviewed within three years of the date of publication.

© 2025 Royal College of Anaesthetists

This leaflet may be copied for the purpose of producing patient information materials. Please quote this original source. If you wish to use part of this leaflet in another publication, suitable acknowledgement must be given and the logos, branding, images and icons removed. For more information, please contact us.