

Electro-convulsive therapy



INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR SERVICE USERS AND CARERS



This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT). You may wish to know why ECT is used, what ECT is, what it is like to have ECT and what the risks and benefits may be.

Most people who have ECT prescribed for them suffer from severe depression or, more rarely, some other major mental disorder. Although there are tablets to help with depression and other mental illnesses, some people do not recover completely and others take a long time to recover. ECT is often used for these patients. Indeed, in some cases of depression, ECT may be the best choice of treatment - it might even be life saving.

How it might help you

- it may be helpful if you have not got better with anti-depressant medication;
- it may help you if you can't take anti-depressant drugs because of the side effects;
- it may help you if you have responded well to ECT in the past; or
- it may help if you feel so

overwhelmed by your depression that it's difficult for you to function at all.

Remember - If you have any concerns about being given ECT please don't hesitate to raise them with our staff. They will be only too happy to answer any questions you have until you are fully informed about what's going on.



Preparing for the treatment

As ECT treatment involves having a general anaesthetic, you will need to abstain from eating and drinking for 6 hours prior to having the treatment. You can drink water only for up to 3 hours before the treatment. Please wear loose clothes. You will be asked to remove any jewellery, hair slides, glasses or false teeth.

Before the treatment is given a routine physical health check will

be undertaken. This includes taking your pulse and blood pressure and is a requirement prior to any general anaesthetic. When you are about to undertake an ECT session, you will be taken into a treatment room and before you are given the anaesthetic you will be given a mask and asked to breath oxygen. Once you are asleep you will be given a muscle relaxant which relaxes your body.

How does ECT work?

During ECT, a small amount of electric stimulus is sent to the brain. This current produces a seizure which affects the entire brain, including the centres which control thinking, mood, appetite and sleep. Repeated treatments alter chemical messages in the brain and bring them back to normal. This helps you begin to recover from your illness. The treatment itself is conducted under a general anaesthetic and takes between 4 and 6 seconds to administer, most people wake up 10 minutes later.

Research suggests that over 8 out of 10 depressed patients who received ECT respond well to the treatment. People who have had the treatment say it makes them “feel themselves again” and “as if life was worth living again”. Most patients recover their ability to work and lead a productive life again. ECT cannot help with any difficulties you may be facing in your life, which may have contributed to your depression. However, once your depression is lifted, you will hopefully be able to deal with these problems more effectively.



Immediately after receiving ECT

You will be transferred to the recovery area where a qualified nurse will offer reassurance and make you feel as comfortable as possible. The nurse will monitor your recovery till you are fully awake and within 30 minutes you should be alert enough to take some light refreshments.

Some people wake up with no side effects at all and simply feel relaxed. Others may feel somewhat confused, this is common after receiving a general anaesthetic and generally lasts for a short period of time. You may wake up with a headache and if this happens you will be offered something for the pain.

What's meant by a course of ECT?

ECT is given twice a week. It is not possible to say exactly how many treatments you will need. Some people get better with as few as two or three treatment sessions, while

others may need as many as 12 and very occasionally more. Your doctor will review you regularly, and you will not be offered more treatments than you require as an individual.

Are there any side effects?

Some patients say they are confused just after waking up from the treatment but this generally clears up within an hour or so. There is sometimes some temporary memory loss about events, telephone numbers etc. This memory loss usually goes away in a few days or weeks, although some patients experience some loss of memory for a few months. However, ECT should not have any long-term effects on your memory or your intelligence.

ECT is amongst the safest medical treatments given under general anaesthesia. The risk of any problems is one in 50,000 treatments which is much lower than childbirth for instance. As you are receiving an electric current, it is important that we know if you have any heart problems. It is still possible to have ECT safely even with a heart problem but we have to take special precautions.



What happens when I go into hospital?

When you arrive, you will be taken to a ward where the nursing team will welcome you and help you settle in. The nurses will check through your belongings with you. If you want, they can look after cash, valuables and possibly other items for you. They will take any items away from you that they think are unsafe. We will arrange for you to be interviewed by a doctor, and you may want your carer to stay with you in case they want to speak to the medical or nursing team. Please

tell staff if you have been taking any medication. If you have brought any medication with you, please give it to the nursing staff. You will also need to tell staff as much information about your physical health as possible such as if you are pregnant, using alcohol or drugs, or suffer from allergies. This will help us give you the right care for your needs. At this stage, a key nurse will begin to work with you to plan your care.

What should I bring with me?

You will need to bring:

- dressing gown;
- slippers;
- nightdress or pyjamas;
- hairbrush or comb;
- flannel or sponge;
- soap;
- toothbrush and toothpaste;
- electric razor – if you have one;
- ordinary indoor clothes and shoes;
- underwear;
- small change for the phone;
- outdoor shoes; and
- coat or jacket.

Don't worry if you have not been able to pack your things before coming to hospital. The ward staff will give you the main items you need.



What happens if I don't have ECT as recommended?

Your team will have thought very carefully about offering you this treatment. If you choose not to accept your doctor's recommendation to have ECT, you may experience a longer and more severe period of illness and disability than might otherwise have been the case. The main alternative is drug therapy, which also has risks and complications and is not necessarily safer than ECT.

The Trust employs a lead Nurse for ECT, who is contactable to discuss any questions or worries you may have about ECT and will be happy to meet you, your advocate, friend or relative if you wish.

Lead Nurse

George McCulloch can be contacted by phoning: 020 82067200 or 07866 678 623

ECT Clinics

St Charles Mental Health Centre

Monday and Thursdays @ 9:15hrs

Contact phone number 020 8206 7200

Northwick Park Mental Health Centre

Tuesday and Fridays @ 9:30hrs

Contact phone number 0208 869 3520 or 07960309527

South Kensington & Chelsea Mental Health Centre

Tuesday and Fridays @ 9:15hrs

Contact phone number 0208 846 2719 or 07866678623

If you would like information in another language or format please ask us.

Central and North West London 
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