



Your child's imaging scan under general anaesthetic

This leaflet is for parents and carers of children having a scan under general anaesthetic (i.e. while they are asleep). It aims to answer some of the questions that you or your child may have about preparing for the scan and what happens during and after the anaesthetic and scan. You will also have an opportunity to discuss any further concerns with us, on admission.

A general anaesthetic requires your child to fast beforehand.

Morning admission:

Last food: 2.30am

Last breastfeed: 4.30am

Sips of water, clear juice or weak squash until admission

Afternoon admission:

Last food: 7.30am

Last breastfeed: 9.30am

Sips of water, clear juice or weak squash until admission

Please be aware that formula milk, cow's milk, fizzy drinks, sweets and chewing gum are considered food.

If you do not follow these instructions your child's procedure will be postponed.

Why does my child need a scan?

The doctor who saw you in clinic or on the ward will have requested a scan to help confirm a diagnosis. Scans such as MRI, CT or ultrasound can provide information that is also helpful in deciding the best treatment. If you are unsure why your child has been asked to have a scan, please contact the relevant department to speak to the doctor who ordered it.

What are the different types of scan my child may have?

We can perform MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), CT (computed tomography) and USS (ultrasound sonography) scans at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Your doctor will have advised which type of scan your child should have.

What do the scans involve?

A CT scan looks like a doughnut and usually takes no longer than 5 minutes. An MRI scan is like a hollow tube and can take 10-45 minutes to complete, depending on which body part is being

scanned. The MRI scan is noisy and your child will be given ear defenders to wear before the scan. For MRI and CT scans it may be necessary to inject contrast into a vein via a cannula (plastic tube in the hand or arm) in order to help give more information.

An ultrasound or USS is performed by the radiologist using a probe placed directly on your child's body. Clear and cold jelly is applied to the skin before the scan. This is not painful.

Why does my child need a general anaesthetic (GA) to have a scan?

Some of the scans require the child to remain still and if there is any reason your child is unable to do so without getting distressed, they may need a GA. This will be decided by the assessing doctor who ordered the scan. Occasionally, if we think your child may be able to tolerate the scan without a GA, we may suggest that they try having the scan whilst awake. If they think your child does not need a GA, we have play therapists on the unit who can assist and distract your child during the scan. If the attempt is not successful, your child will be rescheduled promptly for a GA slot at a later date.

What are the risks of a GA?

The Royal College of Anaesthetists have a useful infographic showing the common events and risks to children and young people having a general anaesthetic, with links to child-friendly short videos – visit

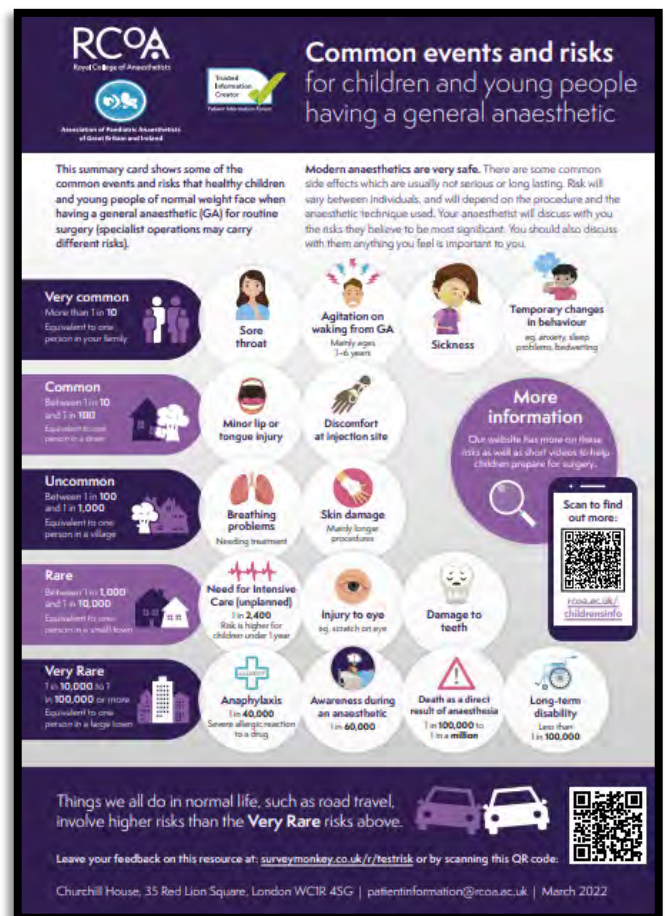
<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/anaesthesia-risk/children-young-people>

Or scan the QR code:



What shall I bring to hospital?

- Please bring spare nappies if your child is using them.
- It helps to bring a familiar toy or comfort blanket from home.
- Children can also wear their own clothes as long as there is nothing metal on the clothing such as poppers and zips. This is relevant only for an MRI scan.
- It is also helpful to bring in some drinks and snacks for your child to have after the scan if they are having a GA.



What can I do to help my child prepare for the GA and scan?

We would recommend watching some online videos at home together. These are available on YouTube:

- [Your child's general anaesthetic – magic milk and squidgy masks](#)
- [Rees Bear has an anaesthetic](#) ([British Sign Language version](#) also available)
- [Toby has an anaesthetic](#)
- [Anaesthesia – what do I need to know?](#) (For children > 12 years old)

When can we go home?

Your child will be expected to be discharged on the same day of the scan. After waking up from the GA, you and your nurse will escort your child back up to Kempton Day Bed Unit on a trolley. Your child should be comfortable, alert and must have had something to eat or drink before we will allow them to go home.

Advice following MRI/CT

- None of the scans are expected to cause any pain.
- The radiologist will review your child's scan and send a report to the doctor who ordered the scan. Unless there is an urgent need to start any treatment, you will hear directly from your doctor.
- Your child will need the rest of the day off at home. They can then safely return to nursery or school as normal the following day.

Useful contacts

Pre-op nurse: 0118 322 7518

Kempton Day Bed Unit: 0118 322 7512 / 8754 (Mon-Fri 7am-7pm)

Lion & Dolphin Ward: 0118 322 7519 / 8075 (outside of these hours)

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Rewritten by Dr May Chan, Consultant Anaesthetist, RBFT Paediatric Unit, September 2026

Next review due: September 2028