



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Breastfeeding and General Anaesthetic

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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Contents	Page
Introduction	3
Do I have to stop breastfeeding if I have an anaesthetic?	3
Do medicines used during my operation get into breast milk?.....	3
Do I need to express and discard breastmilk after surgery?	4
Are there any alternatives to having a general anaesthetic?	5
Can I take pain medication after my procedure?	6
Is there any medication that I should not take while breastfeeding?.....	7
Can I bed share following my anaesthetic?	8
Where can I find more information?.....	9
Tell us what you think of this leaflet	11
Teaching, training and research.....	11
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).....	11
Leaflets in alternative languages or formats	12

Introduction

Parents often worry that anaesthetic drugs could pass into breastmilk and harm their baby. These concerns may lead to unnecessary risks, such as avoiding essential surgery, discarding breastmilk or stopping breastfeeding. This leaflet will help to address any concerns you have.

Do I have to stop breastfeeding if I have an anaesthetic?

No, you can have a general anaesthetic and breastfeed as soon as you are awake and alert following surgery.

Do medicines used during my operation get into breast milk?

Anaesthetic, sedative and pain relieving medicines are transferred to breastmilk in only very small amounts. For almost all medicines used before, during and after operations, there is no evidence of negative effects on a breastfed child.

In advance, let the anaesthetic and surgical teams know you are breastfeeding and they can help support you and answer your questions.

Do I need to express and discard breastmilk after surgery?

Discarding breastmilk, or 'pumping and dumping,' is not necessary. As long as you are awake enough to recognise that you have a baby and you want to breastfeed, the amount of medicine in your breastmilk will be low.

You can also use any breastmilk expressed after surgery as usual.

Are there any alternatives to having a general anaesthetic?

The type of surgery you are having often determines what type of anaesthetic you need. Your anaesthetic team can advise you on this.

There are different types of anaesthetics:

- Local anaesthetics - injection of a medicine called a local anaesthetic that can numb the nerves. This can sometimes be done at the site of surgery, around nerve bundles in the armpit or groin (regional anaesthetics) or in the back to numb the lower half of the body (spinal anaesthetic). This might be preferred due to a quicker recovery and less need for other pain relief. You can breastfeed as normal as soon as you feel ready.
- Sedation - administration of drugs to help you relax during a procedure. It can be just a small amount to reduce anxiety or a larger amount to make you feel sleepy. This can often be used together with local anaesthetic. You can breastfeed as soon as you feel awake enough to safely hold your baby.
- General anaesthetic - you will be asleep for the procedure. You may also be given a local anaesthetic to reduce the need for other pain relief afterwards. You can breastfeed as soon as you are awake enough to safely hold your baby.

Can I take pain medication after my procedure?

Yes. It is important for your recovery that you are comfortable after your procedure, so you should take pain medication as needed and ensure you have appropriate medication at home for when you leave hospital. Read the medication information leaflet for full information:

- **Paracetamol** - if you experience discomfort, you should take paracetamol regularly as directed on the medicine leaflet. It is safe for you and your baby.
- **Anti-inflammatory drugs** - ibuprofen **or** diclofenac can be taken together with paracetamol if you can normally take these medications. Only a very small amount passes into your breastmilk.
- **Opioids** - medicines like dihydrocodeine, tramadol, morphine and oxycodone may be used for more severe pain after surgery and are prescribed by a medical professional.
These can affect people differently and you should only take the minimum amount and shortest period of time. You can still breastfeed as long as you feel awake and alert enough to do so.
- **Codeine** - **do not** take codeine or co-codamol (combination of paracetamol and codeine) while breastfeeding.

Is there any medication that I should not take while breastfeeding?

Some over-the-counter medications like aspirin or codeine (which is present in co-codamol) are not advised while you are breastfeeding.

You can ask the anaesthetic or surgical teams for help if you are unsure a medication is safe.

Alternatively contact your GP or a pharmacist.

Can I bed share following my anaesthetic?

It is always safer for your baby to sleep in their own cot. But you **should not** bed share for 24 hours after having a general anaesthetic. At this time, another adult should be present to help you look after your baby.

For more information about baby sleeping advice see <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/baby/baby-basics/newborn-and-baby-sleeping-advice-for-parents/safe-sleep-advice-for-babies/>.

Where can I find more information?

There are a number of resources if you want more information.

- **Breastfeeding network**

Visit their website

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/>



- **Labour pains**

Visit their website: <https://www.labourpains.org/home-special-circumstances/anaesthesia-in-breastfeeding-mothers>



- 2026 Guidelines for anaesthesia and sedation for patients who are breastfeeding from the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland. Visit their website <https://doi.org/10.1111/anae.70128>



Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact Anaesthetic Department, York Hospital, 01904 726360
Email: yhs-tr.anaesthetic.office@nhs.net.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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