

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your nurse or psychiatrist.

Electroconvulsive Therapy

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) uses a small amount of electrical current to alter your brain's chemical responses. This therapy may help people who do not respond to (or cannot tolerate) treatments. These may include therapy sessions or medications for disorders, such as:

- Depression
- Mania
- Psychosis
- Catatonia
- Certain neurological illnesses

ECT can help improve your:

- Activity level
- Mood
- Sleep pattern
- Appetite

During ECT treatment, you will not be awake or aware of your surroundings. An anesthesiologist, as well as the psychiatrist, will monitor you during the procedure. They will give you medications and oxygen.

ECT often includes 6 to 12 treatments. These are usually done 2 or 3 times a week. You may get treatments during a hospital stay or on an outpatient basis.

The number of treatments depends on your symptoms. Often it takes several treatments to notice the benefits of ECT. This treatment needs to be combined with your prescribed medications and routine therapy sessions.

Before your ECT treatment

Getting ready

In the days before the ECT treatment, you will meet with your psychiatrist and an anesthesiologist. They will explain ECT, its benefits and side effects. They will ask you to sign a consent form.

You may need some other tests, such as:

- EKG
- Blood and urine samples
- Chest X-ray

Night before ECT

Do not have anything to eat or drink after midnight the night before the ECT treatment. This includes hard candy. Do not chew gum (or Nicorette® gum).

Day of the treatment

For inpatients

On the morning of ECT treatment, nursing staff will prepare you for the procedure. They will ask you to take off all jewelry, partial or full dentures, hearing aids, contact lenses, glasses and make-up. You will wear a hospital gown. Before you leave the unit, you will need to empty your bladder. Then a unit staff member or a hospital transporter will take you on a stretcher to the ECT treatment area.

For outpatients

Do not have anything to eat or drink. Check with your psychiatrist about taking needed medications in the morning of the ECT treatment. As directed by your psychiatrist, take medications with small sips of water. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and take off any jewelry and nail polish. Be sure to:

- Have a responsible adult come with you to the hospital. You may not go home alone after ECT treatment.
- Bring your mouth guard and ambu-bag to the hospital for all ECT treatments.

Arrive at the hospital by 6 am if your procedure is on a Monday through Thursday and by 7 am if your procedure is on a Friday. Come to the registration desk on the 5th floor, Feinberg Pavilion, 251 East Huron Street. Parking is available for patients and visitors at 222 East Huron Street, across from Feinberg and Galter pavilions. For a discounted rate, bring your parking ticket with you. You can validate your ticket at the Customer Service Desk on the 1st and 2nd floor of Feinberg and Galter pavilions or the 1st floor of Prentice (including the Prentice 24-hour desk near the Superior Street entrance).

When you first arrive, the desk staff will check your registration. If there are any delays, the staff will ask you to wait in the reception area. Staff will keep you updated during this time.

The nurse will take you to the procedure area where you can change into a hospital gown. At this time, you will remove dentures, hearing aids, contact lenses and make-up.

ECT procedure

After you arrive in the ECT area, a nurse will put an IV (into the vein) line in the back of your hand. They will use it to give you medication and needed fluid. The care team will put a heart monitor on you to check your heartbeat during the treatment. They will put a cuff on your arm to check your blood pressure.

A specially trained team of physicians and nurses will be with you during the entire treatment.

- A psychiatrist will do the ECT treatment.
- The anesthesiologist will monitor you during the treatment, give medications and help your breathing as needed.
- Nursing staff will help you and check your progress after the ECT treatment.

The care team will put small pads on your head and upper body to check your brain waves. They will give you medication through the IV to make you sleep. They will help you put the mouthguard in your mouth. Once you are asleep, an electric current will pass from the ECT machine to your brain. This will cause a seizure (with limited muscle movement) that lasts about 30 to 60 seconds. The care team will use IV medication to manage your body's response to ECT. You will have no pain or feeling during the treatment, and you will not be awake for it.

After ECT

After the treatment, you will feel sleepy and slightly confused about your surroundings for 45 minutes to an hour. You will not remember the actual ECT treatment. The nursing staff will check on you often and monitor your blood pressure and heart rate. As soon as you are alert and breathing well, you will leave the treatment room.

- **Inpatients** will return to their room on a stretcher. You may go back to eating your regular diet. Many patients often take a nap when they return to their room. The nurse will continue to check on you.
- **Outpatients** will go to the Same-Day Surgery area where you can change your clothes and have a snack. The nurse will take your IV out and you can go home when you are ready. Each patient must go home with a responsible adult. You may go back to eating your regular diet.

For the next 24 hours:

- **Do not make any important decisions**
- **Do not drive a car or any other vehicle**
- **Do not operate dangerous equipment**

Common side effects:

- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Slight sore throat (if a breathing tube was in place during the ECT treatment)

Tell your nurse or psychiatrist if you have any of these effects. You can have medication to relieve the effects.

In some cases, you may have either:

- Short-term memory loss during the weeks you are getting the ECT treatments (for example, forgetting what you had for dinner, not remembering talking to someone earlier in the day). Your ability to remember will often return within a few weeks to a few months after the treatments are finished.
- You may have “spotty” memory loss for events that happened as far back as 6 months before starting the ECT treatments. This memory loss can last.

Be sure to tell your psychiatrist and the nurse about any memory loss.

Follow-up care

To have the best outcome to improve your quality of life, your psychiatrist may suggest weekly or monthly outpatient ECT treatments along with medication and regular therapy sessions.