

## Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

### What is electroconvulsive therapy ECT?

Electroconvulsive therapy (ETC), uses electricity to stimulate the brain to produce a seizure. ECT has been found to decrease and relieve depression and other mental health symptoms.

### Why is ECT used?

ECT is most often used to treat major depression. If other forms of treatment have not been helpful, often ECT will work. When medicines to treat depression have not helped or if you can't use them, you may try ECT. ECT may also be used for psychosis, mania, or catatonia when other forms of treatment have not helped.

### How do I prepare for ECT?

Your doctor will explain the benefits and the risks of ECT and why it is an option for you. If you choose to have ECT, you must first sign a consent form for the treatment. You will need other tests or studies to make sure you are ready.

If you are taking benzodiazepines, you should not take them after 6 pm before the ECT. After midnight the night before ECT, you should not eat or drink anything. The morning of, after you arrive, we will ask you to put on a gown. The nurse will ask you to empty your bladder and take out dentures, remove eye glasses, or any hairpins.

### What happens during ECT?

We will give you medicines through an IV to make you drowsy and to relax your muscles. During the treatment, you will be asleep the entire time and closely watched by an anesthesiologist. You should feel nothing. You will have wires attached to your forehead. We will send a very brief

electrical charge through the wires. As a result, you will have a seizure for about 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Movements are very slight. You may have goose bumps and your eyes may flutter.

### What can I expect after ECT?

After ECT, you will wake up within a few minutes. You will likely be confused for a couple of minutes. A nurse will check your vital signs often. The nurse will make sure you are comfortable. The nurse will tell you where you are and what has happened. Keep in mind confusion will most often only last a short time. Nurses will be there to help you through this time.

If you have any headache, muscle aches or pain, we will give you medicines. Dizziness, nausea, headache, and muscle soreness, most often go away the day of the treatment. You should feel like yourself within 2 hours. After that, you can resume your normal routines, except for driving a car.

It is normal to have amnesia after an ECT treatment. Some people notice a problem with their memory. Please note that this rarely lasts longer than a few months.

### What about when I go home?

If you are having ECT as an outpatient, you must have an adult take you home and stay with you until the next morning. For the first day, you should also not drive any machinery, use power tools, or do other activities that require clear thinking.

**What is the common course of treatment?**

People often improve a great deal after a few treatments. Yet, you will need further treatments for a more complete effect. For depression, patients tend to have 8-12 treatments. There are no guarantees against relapse. Some patients need added treatments 1-2 times per month. Each time you have ECT, we will explain it with care since you may forget the treatment itself.

**For More Information**

For answers to your questions about ECT, please ask your doctor or nurse. We want you to understand ECT and are here to help you.

**Questions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4472.