

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is a treatment used to balance your mood quickly. ECT uses electricity to stimulate the brain. ECT decreases depression and other mental health symptoms when medicine and other treatment are not helpful.

Before Treatment

Your doctor will explain the benefits and risks of ECT and why it may help. Your doctor may order other tests. If you choose to do ECT, you will sign a consent form. Before treatment, your doctor will review your current medicines and advise what medicine you should not take the day before because some medicines affect how well ECT works.

Do not eat or drink after midnight the night before ECT. Make sure you clean your hair and do not use any hair products other than shampoo and conditioner before your ECT.

During the Treatment

After you arrive, a nurse will ask you to empty your bladder. You will change into a hospital gown and remove dentures, eyeglasses/contact lenses, hearing aids, or anything in your hair.

We will give you medicines through an IV to relax your muscles and help you fall asleep.

Then, we will place wires on your forehead and send a small electric charge through them. This charge causes a brief seizure that lasts about 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

Movements are very light. You may get goosebumps or have slight eye flutter. You will not have hard shaking or feel any pain.

After Treatment

After ECT, you will wake up within a few minutes. You may feel confused for a short time. A nurse will be by your side during this period. They will check your vital signs and keep you comfortable.

It is normal to have mild memory loss after ECT. This rarely lasts more than a few months.

If you have a headache, sore muscles, or mild pain, we can give you medicine. Signs like dizziness, nausea, headache, and muscle aches go away the same day. Most people feel like themselves again within 2 hours.

Going Home

If you are discharged the same day, an adult must drive you home and stay with you until the next morning. **Do not** drive, use power tools, or do tasks that need clear thinking on the first day.

Common Treatment Schedule

Many people feel much better after a few visits. Most need more sessions to get the full effect. For depression, people often need 8–12 treatments. These may happen every few days at first and then once each week.

There is no sure way to prevent symptoms from coming back. Some people need added treatments once or twice each month. Each time you come; we will explain the steps again in case you have any questions.

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:

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 © 2/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4472.