
Electroconvulsive Therapy

**WHAT PATIENTS AND
FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT ECT**

What is Electroconvulsive Therapy

- A Safe and Effective treatment that uses electricity to cause a controlled seizure to improve a patient's mood.

What does it do?

- ECT is used to improve a person's mood

Benefits

- Most patient's who get ECT will have a real benefit from this safe and effective treatment.

Psychiatric Disorders Treated with ECT

- Major Depression- Severe - with or without psychotic features
- Bipolar disorder – currently depressed or (rarely) manic
- Schizophrenia with mood component
- Catatonia
- Other Conditions

Who may receive ECT?

- ECT is safe for most people
- Geriatric
- Pregnancy
- Postpartum
- Those unable to tolerate medications
- People younger than 18 may receive ECT with special considerations

How many treatments will be needed?

- The average number of treatments is 8 to 12.
- Some patients need fewer or more treatments.

Before ECT

- Patients are given a brief test of memory and orientation before ECT to assess orientation
- The treatment team will enlist the family's help in assessing patients progress (this is vital information)

Practical aspects of ECT

- Patients are asked not to eat or drink from midnight the night before treatment until they return to the floor after treatment
- IV fluids are started the night before ECT – Patients who are well hydrated have more effective treatment with fewer head and muscle aches

Practical aspects of ECT

- Patients can be given medications prior to ECT if headache or nausea is a problem.
- Some people may be given some of their cardiac medications prior to ECT with sips of water.

Preparation

- Patients will be asked to dress in a gown for treatment – they may wear their underwear or pajama bottoms.
- Non Slip socks are worn by the patient
- Patients are asked to remove jewelry, watches, dental appliances and glasses and place them in their room in a safe place.

Preparation

- For the first treatment patients will go later in the morning to allow time for all pre-ECT checks to be done.
- Patients are asked to go to the bathroom prior to treatment

Nursing Care

- A nurse and clinical assistant are assigned to care for the patient before and after the treatment on the unit
- The Nurse will determine when the patient is ready to shower, dress and eat
- Patients are frequently drowsy and at increased risk of a fall immediately after ECT

Medications during ECT

- The patient is put to sleep for approximately 5 to 10 minutes with a short acting anesthetic agent
- A muscle relaxant is used during the procedure to stop the patient's muscles from moving during the procedure

In the ECT Area

In the ECT area the patient will be cared for by:

- a psychiatrist
- a resident
- anesthesia team
- post anesthesia care nurses

In the ECT Area

- 2 Electrodes are placed on the patient's head to monitor brain waves
- Cardiac monitoring pads are placed on the patient's chest
- 2 additional electrodes are used to produce the seizure after the patient is under anesthesia

In the ECT Area

- Electrode gel is placed on the patient's head under the electrodes to prevent any chance of a burn
- The patient's brain waves are monitored to assess seizure length and quality

In the ECT Area

- The patient's cardiac and respiratory status are monitored continuously throughout the treatment and recovery period

In the ECT Area

- The Patient will be in the treatment area for approximately 15 to 20 minutes
- Patients are moved to the recovery room and remain there until their blood pressure, pulse and breathing return to near their pre treatment levels. Usually this takes about 20 to 25 minutes.

Common Side Effects

- The most common side effects patients experience are headache, muscle aches and nausea.
- Patients who experience these side effects may be given medication before and/or after ECT.

Major Side Effects

- Thinking and memory side – effects are not uncommon
- Memory difficulty for the period surrounding the treatment or course of ECT is to be expected.
- The most common memory difficulty experienced is remembering things around the time of hospitalization.

Side Effects

- Patients should expect to wait a period of time after ECT to resume driving or operating heavy machinery
- Patients should consult with their doctor prior to resuming driving

Family

- Family members may accompany patients to the ECT suite and wait with them.
- During the procedure, families are asked to wait outside the ECT suite.

Family

- Families will be invited in to the recovery room to support their family member as soon as he or she is stable and if there is room.
- Family members may call the unit to get a post- ECT report if they are unable to be present and if the patient gives permission

After ECT

- Most patients will be drowsy and feel “out of it” on the day of ECT
- Some people may feel like napping but most will be able to see visitors and go to groups by evening of the day of ECT

After ECT

- Because patients are at risk of falling they are carefully monitored for unsteady gait
- Patients may shower when their gait is steady
- The gel used in ECT washes out with water

How Families can help:

- You can help by: providing a gentle reminder of the day and date and that feelings of confusion are to be expected
- Please be sure to inform the nurse of any patient concerns as they may not have told the nurse

Response to ECT

- Most patients will need a few treatments before they will show a response.
- Many people begin to look and act more normally prior to their feeling better, this can be frustrating for people.

Response to ECT:

- Some people show a response to ECT in the hours after ECT that fades as the day progresses.
- This positive response gradually lasts longer between treatments

Ideas for Supporting the Person receiving ECT

- Write down important dates, addresses and numbers. This can be reassuring to the patient.
- Establish a journal and ask visitors to sign in and leave a note. This can help the person recovering on the day of treatment.

Ideas for Supporting the Person receiving ECT

- Make sure the treatment team hears about any pain or concerns of the patient.
- Remind the person that thinking and memory effects are to be expected and receiving the full course of treatment is important

Family

Your feedback regarding how your family member is doing and progressing is critical in assisting the treatment team.

Family

- Please tell the nurse your opinion of your family member's functioning. The nurse will ask about memory, mood and the percent the patient is back to their baseline level of functioning.

Family

- Please feel free to call the social worker, resident physician or nurse with any issues, concerns or questions you may have.

In Conclusion...

ECT is a safe and effective treatment for several psychiatric disorders. At Johns Hopkins Hospital we strive to provide a safe and supportive environment for patients receiving ECT treatments and their families.