

Sedation for children and young people

Information for the public

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About this information

NICE clinical guidelines advise the NHS on caring for people with specific conditions or diseases and the treatments they should receive. The information applies to people using the NHS in England and Wales.

This information explains the advice about sedation for children and young people that is set out in NICE clinical guideline 112.

Does this information apply to me?

Yes, if you are the parent, family member or carer of a child or young person (under the age of 19 years) who is having sedation.

No, if you are aged 19 years or older and are having sedation.

Person-centred care

In the NHS, patients and healthcare professionals have rights and responsibilities as set out in the NHS Constitution (www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england). All NICE guidance is written to reflect these. Children and young people who are having sedation and their parents and carers (where appropriate) have the right to be involved in discussions and make informed decisions about treatment and care with the healthcare team. Their choices are important and healthcare professionals should support these wherever possible. All patients and their parents and carers should be treated with dignity and respect.

To help children and young people, and their parents and carers where appropriate, to make decisions, healthcare professionals should explain sedation. They should cover possible benefits and risks related to the personal circumstances of the child or young person. Children and young people, and their parents and carers, should be given relevant information that is suitable for them and reflects any religious, ethnic, or cultural needs they have. It should also take into account whether they have any physical or learning disability, sight or hearing problem or language difficulties. They should have access to an interpreter or advocate (someone who helps you put your views across) if needed.

If the child or young person is under 16, their parents or carers will need to agree to their treatment, unless it is clear that the child fully understands the treatment and can give consent.

When parents and carers are involved they should be able to discuss or review their child's care. As treatment progresses, or circumstances change, it is possible for children and young people (or, where appropriate, their parents and carers) to change their mind about treatment or care.

All treatment and care should be given with the patient's informed consent. If, during the course of their illness, they are not able to make decisions about their care, their healthcare professionals have a duty to talk to their family or carers unless they have specifically asked them not to. Healthcare professionals should follow the Department of Health's advice on consent (www.gov.uk/government/publications/reference-guide-to-consent-for-examination-or-treatment-second-edition) and the code of practice for the Mental Capacity Act. Information about the Act and consent issues is available from www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/moneyandlegal/legal. In Wales healthcare professionals should follow advice on consent from the Welsh Government (www.wales.nhs.uk/consent).

In an emergency, if the person with parental responsibility cannot be contacted, healthcare professionals may give treatment immediately when it is in the child or young person's best interests.

Sedation in children and young people

Some treatments may not be suitable for your child, depending on their exact circumstances. If you have questions about specific treatments and options covered in this information, please talk to a member of your healthcare team.

Sedation will make your child feel sleepy and calm. It helps to reduce fear and anxiety, control pain or help the person stay still during a procedure. It is used for a range of painful or unpleasant procedures in children and young people. These procedures could be to help diagnose a condition, or for treatment such as dental work. If the procedure your child is having is painful, sedation can help to reduce the pain. Sedation involves an injection, swallowing a liquid or breathing gas through a mask.

What should happen when we see a healthcare professional?

If your child is having a procedure and their healthcare professional (it could be a doctor, dentist or nurse) thinks that sedation will help, the healthcare professional should first see if sedation is suitable for your child. They should ask about past medical problems and medicines your child is taking or has taken in the past (including any allergies). They should also assess:

- current medical condition
- weight
- past experience of sedation or anaesthesia
- their general health, including their breathing, with a physical examination
- their understanding and ability to cope with the procedure.

Different types of sedation

If you think that your care does not match what is described in this information, please talk to a member of your healthcare team in the first instance.

Your healthcare professional should discuss the choice of sedation technique based on:

- what the procedure involves, for example if it is painful or painless
- how sleepy and calm your child needs to be
- if the technique is suitable for your child
- what you or your child prefer.

You should be told about, and given written information on, the proposed sedation technique, any alternatives, and the benefits and side effects associated with each option.

Sedation will go ahead only if you, or your child if they are old enough, consent to it.

The table below shows what usually happens to your child with different levels of sedation.

Level of sedation	What type of procedure might this typically be used for?	How will this affect my child?
Minimal to moderate	Dental work	They will be relaxed and a little sleepy
Moderate	Endoscopy	They will be very sleepy but easily awakened
Deep	MRI scans or setting a broken bone	They will be in a deep sleep

What does my child need to know?

So that your child is fully prepared for the procedure they are having under sedation, they should be given advice that is suitable for them about:

- the procedure that they will be having when they are sedated
- what they should do and what the healthcare professional will do
- what they may feel when having the procedure (for example, numbness)
- how to cope with the procedure.

The healthcare professional giving your child advice should check that they have understood the information.

Food and fasting

Before they start sedation, your healthcare professional should check and make a note of the last time your child ate and drank something.

Your child should not eat for 6 hours before sedation, or drink clear fluids for 1 hour before. If they are breastfeeding they should not have any breast milk for 4 hours before sedation. This may not apply in an emergency or for some types of sedation.

Will I be able to stay with my child while they are sedated?

You should be offered the opportunity to stay with your child while they are sedated if it is appropriate. If you decide to be with them while they are sedated you will be given advice about what to do to help. After your child is sedated you may be asked to wait outside the treatment room while a procedure is performed.

Questions you might like to ask your healthcare team

- How deeply sedated will my child be? And how does this differ from a general anaesthetic?

- What happens if my child eats something a few hours before sedation?
- How can I best support my child during sedation?
- What happens if my child is very anxious about the procedure?
- Will my child have any side effects from the sedation?
- What happens if my child cannot tolerate a procedure under sedation?
- What happens if I don't want my child to be sedated?
- What should I do if my child becomes unwell after leaving hospital?
- If the procedure is painful what pain relief will be given?

More information

The organisation below can provide more information and support for people having sedation. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by this organisation.

- The Royal College of Anaesthetists www.youranaesthetic.info

You can also go to NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) for more information.

Update information

February 2019: the amount of time you can drink clear fluids for before fasting was changed to 1 hour.

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Accreditation

